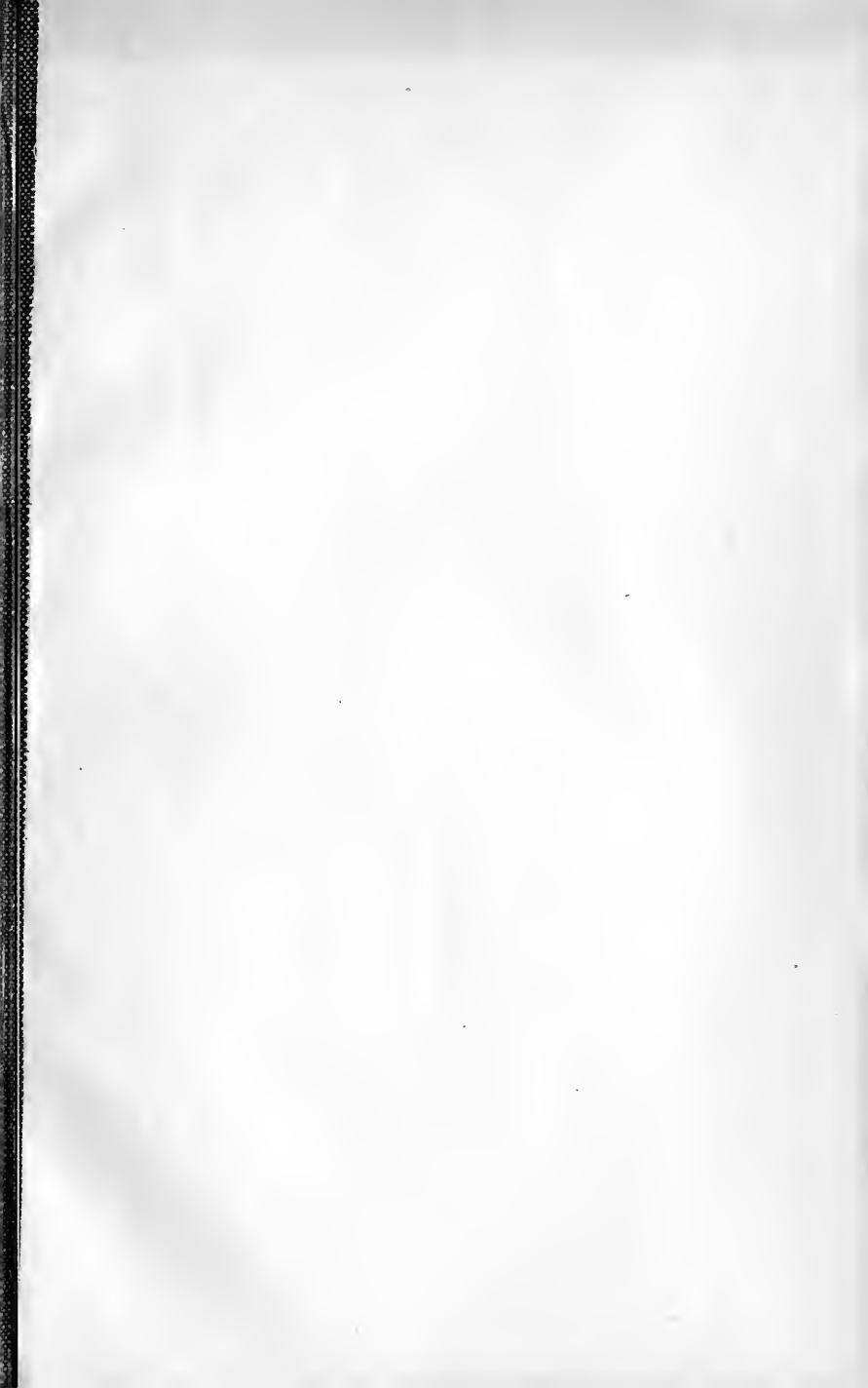




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THE CURFEW:

A Play,

IN FIVE ACTS.

AS PERFORMED

AT THE

THEATRE-ROYAL, DRURY-LANE.

BY THE LATE

JOHN TOBIN, Esq.

AUTHOR OF THE HONEY-MOON.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR RICHARD PHILLIPS,

No. 6, Bridge-street, Blackfriars.

1807.

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PROLOGUE.

BY A LADY.

SPOKEN BY MR. BARTLEY.

RUDE is the tale our Author's scene portrays—
Rude was our Country in her earlier days—
When first the *Curfew*, knell of England's woe,
Proclaim'd the triumphs of the Norman bow;
And haughty William, with unhallow'd claim
And ruthless sword, usurp'd a Monarch's name:
Force then was law—all right was with the strong,
And public plunder charter'd private wrong.
The blasted soil, the track of war reveal'd—
Wild was the forest, and untill'd the field.
In that dark age, the tyrant of the mind,
Gaunt Superstition, trampled on mankind:
Hecate's dire name imperial realms dismay'd,
And sceptred heroes trembled at a shade.
At midnight oft the impious vows were rais'd,
The taper glimm'ring, whilst the cauldron blaz'd:
The hag by fancy loath'd, by hate pursu'd,
With spells abhorr'd th' infernal spirits woo'd:
O'er the blue flames she breath'd the awful word,
And Fate's mysterious characters explor'd:
Her voice the victor's tow'ring soul opprest,
Her eye glanc'd terror thro' the mailed breast.
Drear as the night of winter was that time,
The live-long night of Lapland's arctic clime;
And long a cheerless aspect England bore,
And late the twilight linger'd on her shore.
That time is past; beneath the day-star's smile,
The arts have bloom'd and ripen'd in our Isle;
No spell is breath'd, no impious flame aspires,
The lamp of Science burns with hallow'd fires:—
No vassals own their Lord's imperious claim—
For every Briton boasts a Freeman's name!
By this ennobl'd—at his country's call
He goes—for her, to conquer, or to fall!
Proud by his actions to approve his birth,
The dust of heroes is his native earth!
Ye, who with us, departed times retrace,
Forgive the faults of an unletter'd race:
With candour mark, those customs not your own,
And pity errors to your age unknown:
Too kind for scorn, too just to be severe,
Ye serve no tyrant, and no conqueror fear;
Too blest to envy—for distrust too brave,
Your first, your noblest triumph is to save;
Oh! here with friendly zeal protect our cause,
Your voice is fame, and glory your applause.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

NORMANS.

Hugh de Tracy (<i>a Baron</i>)	Messrs.	BARRYMORE.
Robert (<i>his Son</i>)	-	BANNISTER.
Bertrand (<i>Vassal to the Baron</i>)	-	H. SIDDONS.
Walter (<i>the Toller of the Curfew</i>)	-	PENLEY.
Philip (<i>Servant to the Baron</i>)	-	EYRE.
1st Vassal	-	MADDOCKS.
2d Vassal	-	EVANS.
Friar	-	COOKE.
Matilda (<i>the Baron's Wife</i>)	-	Mrs. POWELL.
Florence (<i>their Daughter</i>)	-	Miss DUNCAN.

DANES.

Fitzharding (<i>Leader of a Banditti</i>)	Messrs.	ELLISTON.
Conrad	} <i>Robbers</i>	MATTHEWS.
Armstrong		PALMER.
Herman		CARLES.
Robbers (<i>disguised as Minstrels</i>)	{ MILLAR. GIBBON. FITZSIMMONS.	

Vassals—Robbers, &c.

THE
CURFEW.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *A Room in the Baron's Castle—A Picture of Matilda, to which the Baron is discovered kneeling.*

Baron. THOU frail memorial of that blessed spirit,

Which, after earthly martyrdom, now sittest
Thron'd with rejoicing angels, see me kneel
With the prone spirit of contrition,
And deep despair to do thee rev'rence :
If that foul deeds, as horrible as mine,
Do ever at the throne of grace find mercy,
Be thou my advocate, with boundless love
Larger than thy exceeding wrongs; plead for me,
That what cannot be pardon'd, may thro' thee
Provoke a lighter penance. (*Rises.*) So—that
done,

My heart hath heav'd off somewhat of its load—
For when in full confession, we pour forth
The inward meditation of dark deeds,
They cease awhile to haunt us.

(*Enter PHILIP.*)

Bar. What brings you ?

Phil. Old Walter, the Curfew toller, is without, and impatient to speak with your Lordship.

Bar. Let him come in. [*Exit Philip.*
A talkative old fool !—

What can he want ? [*Enter Walter.*

Well, Sir, your business briefly.

Wal. Out of respect to your Lordship, I will dispatch it with all brevity and circumlocution.

Bar. Proceed then.

Wal. Your Lordship has no doubt heard of old Margery—

Bar. What, the strange woman on the heath ?

Wal. Ay, my Lord, they say all over the village that she's a witch, and has dealings with the devil, brings blight upon the corn, and murrain among the cattle—she is charged with haying conjured the late terrible drought, and she certainly caused the flood that followed it, for she was heard the day before to wish for rain—she turns her nose up at all our country pastimes, pores all day over books of magic, and prowls all night about the lanes and hedges, gathering poisonous herbs, which she boils in a three corner'd kettle—she has more hard words at her tongue's end than a convent of monks, and has actually been seen taking an airing on a broomstick—'Tis plain she converses with people of the other world, for she never talks to any body in this, and 'tis impossible that any woman can be always holding her tongue.

Bar. What's this to me ?

Wal. They wish your Lordship to have her to the Castle, and examine her, for if she be a witch

your Lordship knows we have a very wise law, that she must be drown'd alive, or in plainer terms suffer conflagration.

Bar. Well, well, we'll send for her—Is there aught else?

Wal. Something that more nearly concerns your Lordship.

Bar. That concerns me?

Wal. Your Lordship cannot be ignorant that I am an officer of the peace to his most gracious Majesty King William, whose business it is, to see that all his Majesty's merry-making subjects, put out fire and candle at the tolling of my bell—I am a sort of eight o'clock extinguisher.

Bar. And is this, fellow, what so nearly concerns me?

Wal. Your Lordship shall hear.—In going my rounds, I have noted, for some evenings past, a glimmering light after curfew time, in the north tower of your Lordship's Castle.

Bar. A light in the north tower? Thou dreamest, fellow; 'tis uninhabited.

Wal. Why then 'twas the devil, or a will-o'-the-wisp—tho' they never open their mouths, and I'm sure I heard voices.

Bar. Are you sure of that?

Wal. Positive, my Lord; they didn't talk very loud indeed, for when people are doing things contrary to law, they seldom make much noise.

Bar. You've mentioned this to no one?

Wal. Not to a post saving your Lordship.

Bar. Then keep your counsel still.

Wal. Yes, my Lord—I hope your Lordship is not offended.

Bar. No, no—you've done your duty.

Wal. Your Lordship knows if a rushlight

be seen to twinkle in the hamlet, after the stopping of my clapper (my bell-clapper I mean, my Lord), I am in visible danger of losing my place, and his Majesty a most faithful officer.

Bar. Psha, this tediousness!

Wal. Tediousness? (*aside.*) I wish your Lordship a good day—my tediousness (*aside.*) I wish your Lordship many happy returns of it—you your Lordship won't forget to examine old Margery— [Exit.]

Bar. A light in the north tower, and voices heard?

What should this mean? Can it be possible?
Oh Florence, if in spite of my forbidding,
Basely forgetting your high rank and fortune,
You have declin'd upon a peasant slave,
Sorrow and shame light on you. [Exit.]

SCENE II. *An Apartment in the Castle.*

(*BERTRAND and FLORENCE discovered.*)

Flor. Urge me no more, I will not hear it,
Bertrand,
No more I'll risque the breaking of our law,
Lest I bring danger on my father's house
And mine own honour.

Bert. Well at Curfew then
We'll weep, and bid adieu; yet sure the hour
Sacred to love, when all the world is still,
When lovers cheat the stern commandment
Of such a tyrant law, outweighs in value
The dull unvaried round of common time;
For danger gives fresh keenness to delight.

When we usurp the joy we fear to lose,
And tremble whilst possessing.

Flor. Tempt me not,
For we must part to-night, to meet no more.

Bert. Or meet to-night, never to part again.—
The Abbot of St. Cuthbert's is my friend,—
His charitable aid will join our hands,
And make me master of the richest treasure
That ever lover sigh'd for.

Flor. Nay forbear,
Think of my father—He will ne'er consent.

Bert. I know he'll take it sternly at the first,—
But as his storm of passion heaves to rest,
Nature will softly whisper for his child;
And his affection take a quicker sense
From his short-liv'd unkindness.—Speak, my Flo-
rence.

Flor. Nay, do not press me.

Bert. Come, you must be mine.
There is a kind consenting in your eye,
Which mocks the faint refusal of your tongue:
Love on your rising bosom reigns supreme,
And speaks his triumph in this yielding sigh.

Flor. There is my hand; to-night I will be
thine:

My kindred, dwelling, and proud hopes I quit.
To cleave to thee, and thy poor humble fortunes.

Bert. At sun-set then, you'll meet me at the
Abbey,

And lest your person should create suspicion,
Suppose you come apparell'd as a boy:
And wear, like many a gallant, cap'ring knight,
Whose smooth complexion scarce would hazard
twice.

The keen encounter of the northern wind,
The front of Hector, with a woman's heart.

Flor. Is it so easy then to play the hero?

Bert. 'Tis but to strut, and swell, and knit
 your brow,
 Tell twenty lies in a breath, and round them off
 With twice as many oaths, to wear a sword
 Longer than other men's, and clap your hand
 Upon the hilt, when the wind stirs, to shew
 How quick the sense of honour beats within you,
 How many valiant cowards in brave armour,
 Have bluster'd unsuspected to their graves,—
 Nay, afterwards, frown'd terrible in marble,
 Who at the trumpet's charge, had stood aghast
 And shrunk like tortoises into their shells
 To die with apprehension? (*Noise without.*)

Flor. Hark! my father.

Bert. You will not fail?

Flor. Away, if I appear not
 Conclude me dead.

Bert. Farewell then—

[*Exit.*

Flor. It was not fancy—hush! again it comes
 Along the gallery.

(*Enter the BARON.*)

My father!

Bar. Florence,
 What do you here?

Flor. My Lord—

Bar. Nay, answer quickly.

Flor. I came—

Bar. To meet young Bertrand.

Flor. You have said it,

Bar. There have been lights observ'd in the
 north tow'r,

And voices heard long after Curfew time.

Flor. The light was mine, Sir.

Bar. Whose the voices?

Flor. Mine
And Bertrand's.

Bar. Have I not forbid your meeting?

Flor. When 'twas too late—you let our early
years

Beyond the reach of fate, entwine our hearts;
Then do not in the blossom kill the hope
Which in the bud you cherish'd. I have been
ever

A most obedient child—from mem'ry's dawn
Have hung with silent awe upon your lips,
And in my heart your counsels treasur'd up,
Next to the hallow'd precepts of my God.
But with a new delight my bosom throbb'd,
When first you talk'd of Bertrand, you observ'd,
Sir,

He was a handsome youth. I thought so too.
A brave one. My heart beat with fearful joy—
Not rich you added. There I heav'd a sigh
And turn'd my head aside; but whilst the tear
Stood in my eye, you said, that Fortune's gifts
Were poor, compared with Nature's: then, my
father,

You bade me learn to love him.

Bar. Once indeed,
I had a foolish dream of such a thing.

Flor. Nay, but I dream so still.

Bar. 'Tis time to wake then.

Hear me, and let thy froward heart determine—
If thou hast grace to scorn this abject passion,
Here is thy father's bosom, in it hide
Thy kindling blushes, and be mine again.
What! stubborn to the last, and unrelenting!—
Then hear me, and let thy free choice decide—
If in the headstrong course of thy desires,
And the rank pride of disobedience,
Thou wed'st thyself to this my low-born vassal,

Living, my persecution shall attend thee,
And when I die, my curses be thy portion.—
You know me resolute, and know my purpose,
And as you dread or slight a father's wrath
So shape your course of action. [Exit.

Flor. Stay, my father.—
He's gone and will not listen to his child.
Then, since a cruel parent has disown'd me,
Bertrand, I am all thine.
And now, that I have giv'n up all to thee,
And cast off every other hope of joy,
If thou should'st ever treat me with unkindness,
Reprove me with sharp words, or frowning looks,
Or (which is keenest agony to those
Who deeply love,) torture me to the soul,
With civil, cutting, cold indifference.—
No—thou art truth itself, I will not doubt thee. [Exit.

SCENE III. *The dark Part of a Forest.*

(Enter FITZHARDING and ARMSTRONG.)

Arm. Now then, we are alone, and secret—
 your business, Captain?

Fitz. You are my enemy.

Arm. Indeed!

Fitz. You sav'd my life,

Arm. I did, and at some peril—Does that
 offend you?

Fitz. So mortally, that day and night e'er
 since

I've studied how I should dispatch you.

Arm. How! 'tis rather a new mode of return-
 ing such an obligation.

Fitz. 'Twas in the outskirts of the forest
here

We fell in with the officers of justice.

Arm. Ay—not a month since.

Fitz. We stood them stoutly, till your sword
being broke

To the hilt, and I fast bleeding with my wounds;

We were compell'd to fly—the tangling wood;

Familiar to our steps, confounded theirs :

And we had lost the yell of their pursuit;

When quite exhausted with the loss of blood

I sunk into your arms, in which you raised me,

And as the lion bears her wounded whelp

From the thick danger of the hunters' spears.

You bore me home—there being arrived, I fainted.

Arm. I thought 'twas an act of kindness.

Fitz. So far I was your debtor; but what fol-
low'd ?

You stripp'd me to get at my wounds. What
then ?

Nay, you perceived it—Speak.—

Arm. I saw a brand upon your left shoulder
that—

Fitz. I know you did—for when I first awoke,

Your eyes were to that quarter rivetted.

You know my secret, Sir, and have revealed it.

Arm. No, on my soul.

Fitz. Swearsome tremendous oath,
It ne'er has pass'd thy lips.

Arm. May mercy never reach me, if I e'er
breath'd a syllable of it.

Fitz. Thou art my friend then. Hark !

Arm. 'Tis a man's tread,

Fitz. A lusty one.—Stand back and let us note
him.

(*A FRIAR passes over the Stage.*)

Fitz. Whither so fast, good father? (*Stopping him.*)

Friar. Stay me not,
I have most pressing business at the Castle.

Fitz. At the Castle? (*aside*).—What's thy business there?

Friar. You are rude, Son,
It is of private import.

Fitz. Answer me,
Or I will pluck it from thy heart.

Arm. Speak quickly.

Friar. Well, well—

Fitz. No preface, Sir.

Friar. Well, thus it is then,—
The Baron hath a reck'ning with his conscience,
Which I must settle for him.

Fitz. Does he know you?—
I mean your person?

Friar. He has never seen it.

Fitz. But his attendants,—they have seen you,
Sir?

Friar. None of them.

Fitz. And thy name,—thy name is—

Friar. Dunstan.

Fitz. It shall be so (*aside*.) Quickly unhood
thee, Friar,
And cast thy robe of reverence—nay, quickly,
Or I shall call some myrmidons about us,
Will strip thee at the perils of thy skin.

(*He takes the Friar's hood and cloak.*)

So, that is well.—Now mark me—to thy convent
Speed strait, and nimbly, and as you would 'scape
A deadly cold, take not the air to-night:

I have my spirits abroad—home to thy beads,
Fast, pray, confess thyself, do something, nothing,
But keep within doors or—

Friar. I will observe—

May Heav'n in the abundance of its mercy

Pardon this outrage on the church—

Fitz. Away!

[*Exit Friar.*]

You apprehend my meaning?

Arm. I can guess it.

Fitz. Back to our company—to your command

I trust the leading of this night's adventures.

You'll find some stirring friends within the Castle,

Shall smooth your passage there.

Arm. Till then, good night.—

[*Exit.*]

Fitz. The Baron's, conscience rid, and I his priest?

(For so I must be,) Surely out of this
Revenge may fashion something strangely cruel,

Whose bloody memory, in after times,

This truth shall teach inexorable man,

Who has no touch of mercy tow'ards his fellow,

Most injuries, a noble mind may pardon—

But there are insults, cannot be forgiv'n.

[*Exit.*]

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*The Inside of a Cottage.*

(*ROBERT knocks without.*)

Robt.—Hist, hist! Mother.—(*Enters*) Not at home? Then I'll leave this purse on the table, and call for her blessing another time.

[*Enter Matilda from the opposite side.*]

Mat. My Son.

Robt. Your blessing, mother, let it be a short one. There is something will keep famine from the door till I return.

Mat. Where got you this?

Robt. Ask no questions, 'tis yours.

Mat. No, not for worlds would I partake thy guilt.—

How came it thine?—Oh my foreboding heart! Where have you slept these three nights?

Robt. Peace I say.

Mat. Should you have join'd the band of
vage ruffians—

Robt. I have, what then?

Mat. What then! hast thou a moment
Weigh'd the full horrors of an outlaw's life,—
T'exchange the noblest attributes of man

For the worst quality of beasts—to herd
 With the vile dregs and offscum of society,
 And bear about a conscience that will start
 And tremble at the rustling of a leaf?
 To shroud all day in darkness, and steal forth
 Cursing the moon that with enquiring eye
 Watches your silent and felonious tread,
 And every twinkling star that peeps abroad
 A minister of terror—

Robt. Peace I say.

Mat. The blessed sleep you know not, whose
 sweet influence

Ere he can stretch his labour-aching limbs,
 Softly seals up the peasant's weary lids.
 On the cold earth, with over watching spent,
 You stir and fret in sev'rish wakefulness :
 Till nature, wearied out, at length o'er-comes
 The strong conceit of fear, and 'gins to doze :
 But as oblivion steals upon your senses,
 The hollow groaning wind uprears you quick,
 And you sit, catching with suspended breath,
 Well as the beating of your heart will let you,
 The fancied step of justice.

Robt. Hark ! who's there ?

Mat. No one, my son !

Robt. Again !—'tis a man's footing.

Mat. I hear nothing—

Nor aught do I behold, save on yon tree,
 The miserable remnant of a wretch
 That was hang'd there for murder—Look.

Robt. I dare not—
 Can you look on it ?

Mat. It annoys not me.—
 I am no murderer.

Robt. Nor I, nor I.—
 I am no murderer neither—yet for worlds
 I dare not look that way.

Mat. You are a robber,
 And he who robs, by sharp resistance press'd
 Will end the deed in blood—'twas so with him—
 He once possess'd a soul, quick as your own
 To mercy, and would quake as you do now,
 At the bare apprehension of the act
 That has consign'd him to yon naked tree,
 Where every blast to memorize his shame
 May whistle shrilly through his hollow bones,
 And in his tongueless jaws a voice renew,
 To preach with more than mortal eloquence!

Robt. 'Tis a damn'd life, and I will leave it,
 mother,—to-morrow—

Mat. Nay to-night, why not to-night?

Robt. To-night I cannot. (*A knocking at the door*) Hark!

Mat. There's some one now.

Robt. To-morrow, mother, I am your's again.

Mat. To-morrow then— [*Exit Robert.*]

What visitor is this
 That knocks so gently? (*Opens the door.*)

Enter PHILIP.

Is it thou, old man? (*Aside.*)
 What brings thee o'er the bitter breathing heath
 Out of thy dwelling at this freezing hour?
 The piercing air will not respect thine age,
 Or do thy white hairs rev'rence.—Who art thou?

Phil. Servant to the Bâron; or rather one
 grown out of service—yet he keeps me like an old
 tree that has borne good fruit in its time.—He
 had a lady once, and I a mistress; once do I say?
 She may be yet alive, strange things have come
 to pass—they report you have the gift of know-

ing all events, that nothing can betide on earth, sea, or air, but you are acquainted with it.

Mat. They have abus'd thee.—

Phil. Be not offended—if you would but tell me whether my dear lady outliv'd the wreck—

Mat. You would reveal it.

Phil. Never.

Mat. Yes, you would reveal it,
Old men and women will be ever babbling.

Phil. No, as I'm a man.

Mat. I almost trust thee, for thou dost not swear.

If I should tell thee then that she surviv'd—

Phil. I would bless thy voice for ever.

Mat. Should guide thee to the spot which she inhabits.

Phil. I would walk barefoot to it over flint.

Mat. If I should shew her to thy wand'ring sight—

Phil. I would gaze on her tho' blindness follow'd

Mat. Look at me—I am she.

Phil. Nay—now you mock me.

Mat. I am not on such subjects us'd to jest—
Old Philip too forget me?

Phil. Nay, now I look again; it is, it is my Lady—my ever-honour'd Lady, my sweet Lady, my kind Lady—but how did you escape the winds and the waters? Does my young master—yet I fear to ask.

Mat. He lives, and is a man.

Phil. Thank Heav'n! thank Heav'n!

Mat. The warring elements that heard my cries

Would not divorce a mother from her child;
We were both sav'd: to yonder dreary coast

The guardian waves their trembling burden
bore.—

A little treasure, from the wreck preserv'd,
Bought us this humble dwelling.

Phil. 'Tis a sad one; but you shall change it
soon. I am sent by the Baron to bring you to
the Castle.

Mat. How?

Phil. The foolish people have accus'd you of
being a witch.

Mat. Of witchcraft? Well—I see an end in
this

Most level to my wishes. Come, let's on.
All will be set to rights.

Phil. Grant Heav'n it may!

Mat. We shall be happy yet, and like two
streams

United once, and parted by mischance,
Meet at the close, and end our course together.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *A Heath—The Abbey at a Distance.*

Enter FLORENCE, in Male Attire.

Flor. Thus far I have not met a living soul,
Save on the heath, an homeward villager,
Who chid his barking cur, and bade good night
With such kind greeting, that my sinking heart
Took courage. [*Robbers surround her.*]

Heav'n's! what are ye?

Conrad. Don't be frighten'd, young man—your
money—come, your valuables—give us all your

have, and we shan't do you the least injury—only if you make any disturbance, we shall beat your brains out, that's all.

Bertrand (*entering*). Unhand the trembling fawn, if ye are men,
And dare a nobler spoil.

Con. So, there'll be some blood-letting here—I'll make sure of my bird, however—no resistance, youth, 'tis vain—

[*Whilst Bertrand is contending with some of the Robbers, the rest carry off Florence, and as he is on the point of being overcome, some of the Baron's vassals enter and rescue him—the Robbers run off and are pursued.*]

Vass. (*to Bertrand.*) Come, you must with us to the Castle.

Bert. Nay, let us plunge into the thickest wood,

And track these savage felons to their den.

Vass. No, no—there are enough gone upon that errand—our orders are to bring you to the Castle.

Bert. Unhand me, coward slaves! to lose her thus—

Vass. We dare not disobey orders.

Bert. Dare not?—Slaves!—

(*They bear him off.*)

SCENE III. *The Robber's Cave.*

ARMSTRONG, HARMAN, and other ROBBERS *discovered drinking.*

CHORUS OF ROBBERS,

What tho' we shroud in savage den
 From day's all piercing eye,
 Yet have we joys, as other men ;
 Our watchful fears,
 Our perils, cares,
 We sweeten still with liberty,

The rising sun let others greet,
 We worship his declining ray ;
 And whilst the midnight cask we drain,
 Where sparkling meet,
 His light and heat,
 We feel alive in ev'ry vein
 The spirit of departed day.

Har. Come push the liquor about—Here's heavy purses and light fingers.—So, the Captain, you say, has made free with a Friar's canonicals ?

Arm. Ay, and with his character too, for a short time.

Har. And in that disguise means to enter the Castle ?

Hark !

(*A Whistle without.*)

Arm. 'Tis Conrad's whistle—pass the countersign.

[*They pass the countersign, and Conrad and other Robbers enter with Florence.*]

Welcome, lads, welcome—who have you got there?

Con. A youth that we pick'd up in our travels—we found him near the monastery, going, as I conjecture, to pray for a beard—for his chin seems to have a marvellous lack of bristle.—He'll bear some plucking tho'—(*to Armstrong*)

Arm. Ay, ay, the bird's in pretty feather.—Speak, stripling—who are you? whence come you? and whither were you going?

Flor. Good gentlemen, I pray you harm me not.

Con. You're too rough with him—the youth's abash'd at being in strange company—he has'n't been us'd to converse with gentlemen in our sphere, and to say the truth I don't wonder he's a little asham'd—don't be alarm'd, my pretty boy—there's nothing here to frighten you—our worthy commander would know your history, that's all.

Flor. I am a simple lad—Honest, tho' very poor, yet what I have Is freely yours.—This purse contains a trifle, Would it were better worth your kind acceptance—

But as it is you're very welcome.

Con. (*taking the purse.*) A pretty spoken youth, and perfectly understands good breeding.

Arm. Sit down and eat, boy—Our fare is coarse—but you are welcome—Sit down I say—do you mistrust us?

Flor. Oh no—I never yet did wrong to any—
Whom should I fear then?

Arm. Well, sit down—(*She sits at the table.*)
Now, Conrad, you saw our minstrels safely on
their journey?

Con. Ay, and the plan is thus concerted:
After gaining admittance to the Castle—Mind thy
repast, youth (*to Florence*)—they'll easily procure
a night's lodging—what again! (*to her*)—
Within a quarter of an hour, from the tolling of
the Curfew, we must be ready at the northern
gate.

Arm. Enough—We understand the rest—
But what is this same Curfew, that has made such
a noise lately?

Con. What is it?—Why it's a new mode with
your great statesmen of keeping the people in the
dark.—After this same bell has toll'd, 'tis a mis-
demeanor for a horse-shoe to strike a spark from
a flint, and high treason for a glow-worm to carry
fire in his tail.

Arm. A truce with thy jests.

Con. Why then, in sober sadness, this Curfew
custom is a clever invention of this Norman prince
of darkness, to set honest men snoring, and give
rogues an earlier opportunity of cutting their
throats; and which, by shortening their days, will
most probably lengthen ours.

Arm. Still listening (*seeing Florence attentive.*)
I like not that boy (*to Herman*). He has
been deeply attentive to our discourse.

Herm. Dispatch him then.

Arm. 'Twere safest.

Herm. Robert shall do it—Being last enter'd
in our troop, it is his office—(*beckons Robert*).

Arm. (to *Robert*.) *Robert*, that boy has overheard our whole design.

Herm. And may betray us.

Robt. There's no fear of that.

Herm. Not when he's dead—

Robt. How?

Herm. You must do it.

Robt. Murder him?

Herm. Call it what you please, you must dispatch him.

Robt. Keep him a prisoner till to-morrow.

Arm. I tell you our lives are in his breath—
And he must die.

Robt. Well, if it must be so—

Herm. It shall—I like not that hesitating eye. (*aside*)

Arm. We will but skirt the wood and then return—You'll remember. (*to Robert*)

Robt. Ay, ay.

Herm. I'll stay and see it done—My mind misgives me, he may want assistance. (*aside*)

[*All the Robbers go out except Herman, who conceals himself.*]

Flor. What mean their dark looks, and half smother'd speeches,

Where more the eye interprets than the tongue,
And silence is most horrible?

Robt. My mother's a witch sure enough—
She prophesied I should soon turn cut-throat—
Well, youth, you can guess I suppose why they have left us alone.

Flor. Indeed I know not—for no harm, I hope.

Robt. That I should kill thee.

Flor. Nay, but you will not do it, my good fellow.

What's my offence ?

Robt. You ne'er offended me.

Flor. Nor any that doth bear a human form.
I never wrong'd the smallest living thing,
Or trod designedly upon a worm,—
For I was bred to gentleness, and know
Nought that hath fleeting breath, too mean for
mercy.

Why seek you then my life, which gone from me
Will never add a moment's breath to your's ?

Robt. Peace, boy !

Flor. Oh, think upon the horror of the deed.
You have a friend, who knows ;—perhaps a parent,
A father or a mother, think on them—
'Twould almost break their hearts to learn your
death

In nature's common course—How would they
start

To hear you had been slaughter'd in cold blood—
But if they knew you were a murderer,
Oh, they would curse the hour that gave you
birth,

And die stark mad with agony.

Robt. I cannot strike—he withers up my arm
—Now then I'll do't.—Speak, youth, are you prepared.

Flor. Oh no—for life is sweet—death terrible.—

The firmest Stoic meet it with a pang.
How then should I, an unschool'd simple boy,
Look calm at that, which makes the sternest shudder ?

Robt. You must die, youth.

Flor. Nay—yet you will not do it—
You cannot—for your cold relaxing hand
Loosens its gripe, and all your limbs too tremble.

Robt. Now then.

Flor. Nay turn not thus your head aside,
I fain would see how stern the butcher looks
When he doth strike the lamb—You tremble still:
And in your eyes, twin drops of mercy stand.
They fall upon your cheek—nay then you cannot.

Robt. Hear me; I have pass'd my word to
my comrades that you shall die: my hand may
shrink, mine eye may drop a tear.—No mat-
ter, 'tis past, and thus—(*Lifts his hand to strike.*)

Flor. Have mercy on my sex—I am a woman!

Robt. A woman!!!

Flor. What have I said? A thought more
horrible

Then death runs through me now,

Robt. To save her would be great.

Flor. Oh 'twould be glorious—that one sin-
gle act

Shall clear thee at the great day of account.

Robt. You have prevailed.

Flor. And will you save me?

Robt. Were ye a man, I couldn't hurt you
now—for you have made me woman.

Flor. I've no fit means to thank you—but my
tears, my warmest prayers.

Robt. Here is a recompence, which those
who once have felt, will want no other motive
to humanity. But the night wears, my compa-
nions will soon return,—Can you trust yourself
with an assassin?

Flor. Ay, thro' the world.

Robt. Come then I'll guide you faithfully.

(*As they are going out Herman interposes.*)

Herm. You pass not here.

Robt. Herman!

Herm. The same, good trusty Robert.

Robt. Stand by and let us pass—it is a woman.

Herm. Were it an angel, what then?

Robt. Young, fair, and innocent—nay look upon her,

Can you resist that supplicating eye?

Herm. I know my duty.

Robt. Do it then—the first duty of our sex, is to protect the helplessness of hers—Come, come, let us pass—You can't be serious.

Herm. You'll find me so.

Robt. Nay look upon her, Herman.

Herm. Well.

Robt. Can neither her youth, her beauty, her sex or her condition move you?

Herm. Not a step.

Robt. You are a devil then.

Herm. If you attempt to pass, you'll find me one.

Robt. Why then there's left no argument but this.

Herm. Which thus I answer.

Robt. If blood must be shed, it shall be man's blood.

Herm. Your's or mine.

Robt. Come on then (*they fight off the stage.*)

Flor. Now sit upon the righteous sword, just Heav'n,

And where the cause is honest, give the power—
Hark! the rude clashing of their angry steel
Gives way to death-like silence.

Re-enter ROBERT.

Robt. Now then, lady.

Flor. What, is he dead?

Robt. And buried, I have thr own him

Into the roaring torrent, that must serve
Both for his shroud and knell.—Think not of
him!—

He was a wretch without remorse or pity,
Who bloodily hath bought a bloody end:
Come, 'tis no time for words.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT III.

SCENE I. *The Cottage.*

(*Enter ROBERT, leading in FLORENCE.*)

Robt. This is the humble dwelling that I spoke of: You may rest here in safety to-night, and to-morrow, shape your course as it pleases you.

Flor. (*looking round.*) You know the woman who inhabits here?

Robt. Ay, know her well; you'll find her a kind soul. I would stay with you till she return'd; but I must get back before my comrades, to avoid suspicion—Farewell! Should we meet no more, you'll sometimes think of me.

Flor. Whilst I have life.

Robt. Farewell, [*Exit.*

Flor. Upon the bleak and solitary waste
Which my proud father's castle overlooks,
I've sometimes heard, there dwells a wretched
woman,

So deeply skill'd in potent herbs and flow'rs,
The wond'ring village shun her as a witch.
This must her hovel be—for sure a spot
So desolate, and dwelling so unshelter'd

Can harbour no one else.—(*a knocking at the door*)

SECOND VASSAL (*without*).

2d Vass. Open the door.

Flor. Hush! I have heard that voice.

2d Vass. Nay, open quickly.

Flor. It is my father's vassal—should he know me—

2d Vass. Still do you hesitate?

Flor. I will assume

A tone and manner foreign to my nature;

That so, without exposure of myself;

I may betray the mischief that is hatching.

(*Opens the door and three vassals enter:*)

What means this violence?

2d Vass. 'Tis well you came;

Or we had beat the house about your ears.

Flor. Thou poor man's tyrant: and thou great man's slave!

Wherefore this outrage? The low peasant's latch

Should be held sacred as the triple bolt

That guards a palace—ay, more sacred, fellow:

For high-raised mightiness is its own shield.

But who, if lordly pow'r be first to invade,

Shall bar the poor man's dwelling from oppression?

2d Vass. We were commanded by our lord the Baron

To bring before him every living thing,

That in this lonely dwelling we found shelter'd.

Flor.—Well, Sir, you will not shame your Lord's commands

By doing them humanely.—I attend you.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *The Outside of the Baron's Castle.*

(Enter ROBERT.)

Robt. Once more I have a moment for reflection—Shall I return to these merciless dogs? Yes, my safety requires it. But then, the night's adventure—To murder a whole family in cold blood—that I'll prevent however. My mother, now doubly thank'd be her care, taught me the use of letters.—I have shortly stated here our horrible design, yet interceded for the lives of all. (*Shoots an arrow into the Castle.*) So, speed it well—My heart accuses me of treachery—yet there is no alternative. I must either be false to my companions, or a traitor to humanity.

[Exit.]

SCENE III. *A Room in the Castle.**Enter the BARON with Vassals.*

Bar. You were too tame to let them bear her off.

1st Vass. My Lord, they were too many for us: Five, at least, to one—

And all compleatly arm'd too.

Bar. Well, 'tis no matter; bring young Bertrand in.

(BERTRAND is brought in.)

So, Sir, your noble purpose has miscarried,
And I have lost the honour you intended
To fix upon my house.

Bert. You speak, my Lord,
As if your daughter's peril touch'd you not.

Bar. So I be robb'd, what matters who the
thief?

Into what viler hands can she have fall'n,
Than mine own vassal's?

Bert. True, I am your vassal,
And on my body bear some ill-shap'd scars
That vouch my services—but chiefly one
Stamp'd in the bloody field of Hastings—What—
You do remember 't?—When you were un-
hors'd,

Prostrate beneath th' uplifted battle-axe,
With outstretch'd hand, and deprecating eye,
Had not your vassal, 'twixt descending death
And you, his forward body interpos'd—
You might have gorg'd the rav'ning vultures
there.

Bar. It was thy duty, fellow.

Bert. Yet the act

So pleas'd you, that you call'd me your preser-
ver,

And breath'd such wanton praises on my valour,
That I forgot the low-born thing I had been,
Outstretch'd my wing, and sought a nobler
quarry.

You fann'd my young ambition, I became
The priz'd companion of your blooming daugh-
ter.

Oft when I won at tilt or tournament
Some hard-earn'd prize, and laid it at her feet,
With trembling admiration she survey'd me—
Breath'd a full sigh of joy at my escape;
And you applauded. We grew up together—
Our pastimes, studies, sorrows, joys, hopes, fears,
Had but one soul, and what at first was friend-
ship,

Soon ripen'd into love; which you encouraged.

Bar. Which I forbade:

Bert. Your reason?

Bar. Your low birth.

Bert. That is, indeed, past cure! 'Tis now too late

To summon back the dust of my progenitors;
And stamp it with nobility—What then?
Am I to hang my head? creep into corners
Because my father was a hind? I know not
Why I was prest into this bustling world;
But here I am; and let my deeds proclaim me.
Our actions are our heralds, and they fix;
Beyond the date of tombs and epitaphs;
Renown or infamy:

Bar. You talk it highly.

Bert. My Lord, you touch'd me roughly on a point

At which the poor man's blood is quick to kindle

To something of more weight—Your daughter, Sir,

Is in the hands of ruffians: grant me then
Twenty of your attendants; nay, but ten,
Five, or if they for a lost daughter's ransom
Be thought too great a venture,—give me freedom,

And I alone, e'er food shall pass my lips
Or sleep embrace me, will recover her
Or lose myself.

Bar. We shall not trust your valour.

(*Enter FIRST VASSAL.*)

1st Vass. My Lord, a stranger from St. Cuthbert's abbey:

Bar. Ay, I would speak with him. Bear off this madman, and guard him strictly.

Bert. Heav'n protect her then !

(Exit, borne off by vassals,)

Bar. Stand up, my heart ! my shrinking nerves,
wax firm !

For what to this good man I must reveal,
Will want your full assurance.

*Enter FITZHARDING, disguised as the FRIAR,
and attendants.*

Take good heed
That none approach us.

(to the attendants, who retire)

Welcome, rev'rend father,
If to the holy Dunstan I address me.

Fitz. I answer to that name.

Bar. It is a name
That loud report delights to send abroad
For endless deeds of saint-like charity ;
But chiefly has she blazon'd your renown,
That with an excellence almost divine,
You can blot out from the distracted brain
The memory of guilt, and chase away
The frightful apparition of foul deeds,
Which, unaton'd for, will not be at rest.

Fitz. You over-praise my poor abilities,
Tho' in the holy office you have mention'd
I am not meanly skill'd.

Bar. Therein I want
Your aid and counsel.

Fitz. Then deliver boldly
The secret cause that preys upon your quiet ;
And fully too—for in the mind's diseases,
As in the body's, there be patients,
Who by a scant disclosure of their ills,

(Either from foolish modesty or pride)

Mock the physician's labour.

Bar. Trust me, father,
You shall hear all, as fully and distinctly
As were I now before Heav'n's judgment seat,
To make confession of the fact.

Fitz. Proceed.

Bar. You know I am not native of this isle,
But born in Normandy.

Fitz. So I have heard.

Bar. I wedded there, long since, an English
lady,

Most rare in her endowments.

Fitz. You were happy?

Bar. I should have been so—you must have
observ'd,—

For you have deeply read the heart of man,—

A wayward disposition in some natures,

Out of the very height of their enjoyments

To breed their discontents, and make, like devils,

A hell of paradise.

Fitz. Alas! 'tis true.

Bar. E'en such a man was I—would you be-
lieve it?

Possess'd of such a woman, for no cause,

But the excess of her perfections,

Compared with my weak merits to deserve them—

From love's extremest dotage I fell off

To sudden jealousy; in which dark mood,

A letter reach'd me in an unknown hand,

Containing nought but this—" Look to your
wife."

Fitz. Some villain—

Bar. You shall hear, and then decide.
This letter was soon follow'd by another,
Which circumstantially disclos'd my shame,
And made surmise conviction—pointed out

The time, when I might find, in mine own chamber,

My wife in guilty converse with a lover.

Think with what pangs I waited for that hour—

When, as advis'd, I did surprise my wife

In secret with a man.

Fitz. And in your chamber?

Bar. I stabb'd the woman: her companion fled,
And in the darkness of the night escap'd me.

Returning quickly back, I found my wife too,

Whose wound tho' deep was nothing dangerous,

Had, with our only son, a tender infant,

Fled in most wild amazement—Soon in safety

She reach'd the nearest sea-port—thence embark-
ing

For this her native land, they were both wreck'd;

And with the rest of that devoted crew,

In the wide bosom of the ocean perish'd.

Fitz. It was a lamentable fate indeed!

But where's your crime in this? Was she not
guilty?

Bar. Nay, she was spotless—that same pre-
cious villain,—

For that he was a villain soon was palpable,—

In a last letter, closed this scene of horror

With these emphatic words, which, as I read
them,

Were graven on my heart:—"Your wife was in-
nocent;

Yet I'm but half revenged:"

Fitz. But halfreveng'd?

Some one whom you had wrong'd then—

Bar. It should seem so.

Yet to this hour, by what resentment mov'd,

Or who the dark contriver of my shame,

I am most ignorant.

Fitz. That's strange indeed !
And could you never guess?

Bar. No; on my soul.

Fitz. Most wonderful !—Could you remember
no one,

Whom by some galling wrong, some deep fix'd
insult,

You had most grievously provok'd?

Bar. No—never.

Fitz. Ere long, I will refresh your memory.
(*Aside.*)

Bar. I never struck but one man to the heart,
And him I after recompenc'd so nobly,
That my large bounty salv'd his rankling pride,
And drew out all his enmity.

Fitz. Indeed ? (*Aside.*)

Bar. Besides, that man was dead.

Fitz. Art sure of that ? (*Aside.*)

Bar. Or had he been alive, 'twere idle now
To waste the precious time in wild surmise
Who was my instigator. Here am I,
Sole actor of that woful tragedy;
Whose strong remembrance, like an evil spirit,
In some lone house, usurping all my brain,
Drives reason from her seat ; and scares away
The fellowship of comfortable thoughts,
To dwell alone in desolate despair.
Now, I have heard you have a charm for this,
That by some sacred, and mysterious pow'r,
You can make clean my fancy—recreate me,
What once I was, a reasonable man,
Full of the common feelings of my kind,
That I shall laugh and weep like other men,
Pray with an unclogg'd heart; that food shall
nourish,

And sleep refresh me, as the dews of Heav'n
Lift up the languid blossoms; in a word—

(*Enter FIRST VASSAL with an arrow.*)

How, fellow, whence this boldness ?

Vass. Your pardon, my Lord—walking near the northern tower, I found this arrow. This was the feather to it—thinking it contain'd characters that might be of importance, I have broke thro' your commands to present it.

(*Kneeling, presents the arrow.*)

Bar. What have we here ?—these look like characters—

Yet not for me to scan—peruse them, father,
And tell us what they signify.

(*Gives it to Fitzharding.*)

Vass. I hope my Lord will pardon my presumption.

Bar. Well, wait without, Sir;
Nor dare intrude again till you are call'd for.

(*Exit FIRST VASSAL.*)

Fitz. Confusion ! (*Aside.*)

Bar. What, a churchman puzzled too?

Fitz. Somewhat perplex'd, I own—let's try again.

Oh, now I understand it 'tis a song,
A mere love ballad, that the minstrels chaunt
In every town and village—a dull ditty,
And not quite decent for a priest to utter,
Or for a high-bred Baron to attend to :
However, if you wish it, when at leisure
I will repeat the idle madrigal—
But let it not employ this apt occasion
For our more grave deliberations.

I have drawn in with an attentive ear
All you have utter'd—your offence is grievous.

Bar. Ay, father !

Fitz. But the grace of Heav'n is great,
And for the truly contrite, will work wonders.
Leave me a while to meditate alone,
That here, in still communion with myself,
And cool abstraction from all other objects,
I may devote my mind entire to you.

Bar. You'll find me in the gallery.

Fitz. 'Tis well ;
In the mean time, be sooth'd with this assurance,
I will resolve on something speedily,
Shall give you ease for ever.

Bar. How for ever ?
So that the bloody image of that deed
Shall never rise to my remembrance more ?

Fitz. Not even in thy dreams—for death has
none. *(Aside.)*

Bar. May Heav'n assist your holy contempla-
tions ! *[Exit.]*

Fitz. (reads.) " Your castle will be this night
surprized, yourself and all that are in it slaugh-
tered : after the tolling of the Curfew, look to the
northern gate."

A pretty madrigal !—The friar ?—No, no—
He would have mention'd my disguise—who then ?
I do suspect that Robert—He is one

Whom nature has so deeply wrought with pity,
That habit cannot harden him to blood.—

'Twas shrewdly aim'd, but it has miss'd the
mark,

Nor shall perplex me further—for this Baron—
I hold him in my eye, and when I please
Fast in my gripe—I do but soar aloof,
(Like the pois'd vulture hov'ring o'er his prey)

Till having track'd him beyond human help,
I may pounce down securely. [Exit.

SCENE. IV. *The Robber's Cave.*

Enter ROBERT.

Robt. So all's well—I have escaped the track of the blood-hounds—tho' they can't be far off.—I met an half-starv'd wolf in my way, and slew him—his blood will give a colour to my story (*a whistle without.*) Hark! they are at hand. Approach, I am prepared,

Enter ROBBERS.

Arm. Well, is it done? (*Robert shews his hands.*)

Con. Ay, this is well.

Arm. Where's the body?

Con. Come, give us the particulars.

Robt. I led him by discourse to the cliff that overhangs the sea.

Con. What, where I push'd down the bald-headed friar, whilst at his prayers, and bid him say Amen as he descended?

Robt. The same; as he gaz'd upon the elements I stabb'd him in the back—I heard his body dash against the waves, and all again was silent.

Con. (*looking round.*) Where's Harman?

Arm. I miss'd him soon after our setting out.—Has no one seen him?

Robbers. Not I—nor I—nor I.

Con. Taking one of his solitary strolls, I suppose; he generally avoids our company, lest he

should catch the contagion of a little humanity—your right beast of prey always prowls by himself.

Arm. I wish he mayn't have fall'n into the hands of the wolf-hunters.

Con. If he be—there's not a rogue in England will do greater justice to the gallows.

Arm. Nor one to whom the gallows will do greater justice.

Con. I have known him since he was first hatch'd—he had a trick of killing flies in his cradle, which his mother encouraged, that she mightn't spoil his temper. Before he was out of swaddling cloaths, he wrung off the neck of a favourite bird for singing too loud, and she patted him on the cheek, and said he had an excellent ear for music. On being breech'd, he was appointed the family hangman to superannuated dogs, and supernumerary kittens; when a school-boy he would break bounds at the risk of having his back flay'd, to see an execution. As he grew to manhood, the lust for blood grew with him, till having exhausted his genius in tormenting all the other animals of the creation, he fixt at last on man.—But come, let's to the armoury.

Arm. And every man equip himself stoutly—for we shall have a hot night's work.

Con. And if we should be caught, we shall hang, cheek by jowl, like kites on a dove-cote, or rats against a barn-door. No, matter lads, do your duty, and leave the rest to fortune—tho' it mayn't be our luck to escape the gallows, 'tis at least in our power to deserve it, and that to a man of spirit is always some consolation. Come, to the armoury.

[*Exeunt*

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *A Room in the Baron's Castle.*

(*Enter FITZHARDING followed by the BARON.*)

Fitz. The place you say is private?

Bar. Stillas night.—

Fitz. Where sight nor sound, save of ourselves alone, can find admission?

Bar. 'Tis an hallow'd spot,
Which I have chosen for the burial place
Of all my future race.

Fitz. It will do well.

Bar. There, when the turmoil of my brain is
o'er,
And all my senses lie benumb'd in death,
I shall sleep soundly.

Fitz. Ay, and quickly too. (*Aside.*)

Bar. There too my wife,—for I have raised to
her

As proud a monument as art could fashion,—
Instead of the vast ocean's stormy bed,
Should in the silent confines of cold marble
Have crumbled quietly.

Fitz. It is a place
Meet for our bus'ness—when the bell hath toll'd,
We will repair to that sequester'd spot,
Where, under Heav'n's attesting eye alone,

We will perform a deed—which being done,
You are a man again.

Bar. Accomplish that,
And name your recompense.

Fitz. For shame! my Lord,
A pious act remunerates itself:
Or if it did not, my reward is fix'd
Beyond the utmost reach of human pow'r
To give or take away. (*Music without.*)

Bar. What sounds are these?

Fitz. Minstrels, if I may guess.

Enter VASSAL.

Vass. Three vagrant Harpers,
Who carry in their looks long fast and travel,
Beg for refreshment, and a night's repose.

Bar. We are engaged—go give them food and
drink,

And speed them on their journey.

Fitz. Nay, my Lord,
Do not, however weightily inclined,
Forget the laws of hospitality:

They are a people, harmless at the worst,
And often entertaining; and they claim,
From long establish'd custom, as their charter,
Such entertainments, as the truly great
Bestow on humble ingenuity.

I pray you give them audience.

Bar. Be it so. [*Exit Vassal.*]

Fitz. They are the only records of the time,
And many a sad and merry chronicle,
Worthy the note of all posterity,
But for the kindling spirit of their strings,
Would sleep for ever in oblivion.

Enter the three ROBBERS disguised as Minstrels.
From what country, friends?

1st Min. From the North, father.

Fitz. Whither bound ?

1st Min.

For that

We trust to fortune—but the day being spent,
We would your debtors be ; for a night's lodging
Such minstrelsy as our rude skill can touch
Shall be your thanks.

Bar. 'Tis well—we listen to you.

GLEE (*Minstrels.*)

Hark ! the Curfew's solemn sound
Silent darkness spreads around,
Heavy it beats on the lover's heart,
Who leaves with a sigh, his tale half told.
The poring monk and his book must part ;
And fearful the miser locks his gold.
Now whilst labour sleeps, and charmed sorrow ;
O'er the dewy green,
By the glow-worm's light,
Dance the elves of night,
Unheard, unseen.
Yet where their midnight pranks have been
The circled turf will betray to-morrow.

Bar. They have perform'd it with no vulgar
taste or common execution—

[*Enter Vassal.*

Well, what now ?

Vass. The woman whom you sent for is
without, and waits your further orders.

Bar. Bring her before us—(*Exit Vassal.*)
Stand back a while.

[*To the Minstrels.*

This urgent business speedily dispatch'd,
We'll task you further.

[*Minstrels retire up the stage,*

'Tis the prophetsess,
Whom you, no doubt, have heard of,

Fitz.—Tho' not giv'n
To note the fleeting rumours of the time,
Some strange and wild reports of such a person
Have reach'd our convent.

[*MATILDA is brought in,*

Bar. Now observe her then,
Woman, stand forth and answer to our charge.
The universal cry is loud against you
For practis'd witchcraft—the consuming plagues
Of murrain, blight, and mildew, that make vain
The peasant's labour, blasting his full hopes,
Are laid to your account—they charge moreover
Your skill in noxious herbs, and ev'ry weed
Of pois'nous growth, the teeming earth is rank
with

Fatal to man and beast—that these collecting
By the full moon with wicked industry,
You do apply to hellish purposes ;
To shrink up the sound limb, and with a touch
Plant wrinkles on the blooming cheek of youth,
This is not all—they urge most vehemently
That you usurp the night's solemnity
For deeds of darkness, horrible to think of !
That when the yawning church-yards vomit forth
The griesly troops of fiends, that haunt the night,
You have been heard to mutter mischief with
them,

Dancing around a pile of dead men's bones
To your own howling, and with hideous yells.

Invoking curses for the coming day:

How answer you to this?

Mat. That it is false.

Fitz. You answer boldly, woman.

Mat. Holy father,

I answer with the voice of innocence;
That I enjoy the silent hour of night,
And shun the noisy tumult of the day,
Prize the pale moon beyond the solar blaze,
And choose to meditate while others sleep.
If these are crimes I am most culpable.
For, from the inmost feeling of my soul,
I love the awful majesty sublime
Of Nature in her stillness—To o'erlook,
Fixt on some bleak and barren promontory,
The wide interminable waste of waves;
To gaze upon the star wrought firmament
Till mine eyes ache with wonder—these are joys
I gather undisturb'd—The day's delights
I am proscrib'd, and if I venture forth
To taste the morning's freshness, I am star'd at
As one of nature's strangest prodigies.
At my unmeasur'd step, and rude attire,
The speechless babe is taught to point the finger,
And unbreech'd urchins hoot me as I pass;
And drive me to the shelter of my cottage.
The very dogs are taught to bark at me!
But to your charge: I am accused, most wrongly
Of having both the faculty and will
T' infest the earth with plagues, and man with sickness—

Of holding converse with superior beings:—

Why, what a mockery of sense is this?

It is the wildest stuff of folly's dreams,

That I, possessing super human pow'r,

Should thus submit to human agency,

And being brought by your rude vassals here,
Stand to be judg'd by man !

Fitz. That's shrewdly put—

This is no common woman. (*to the Baron*)

Bar. Hear her further.

Mat. Yet have I not consum'd the lapse of
time

In fruitless musing—something I can do,
Of mine own pow'r—for other I have none,
Of which the mention may create a smile,
A sneering smile of infidel contempt,
But whose performance would convert you all
Into the bloodless forms of staring statues.
Have you a dear departed relative,
A buried friend, still living in your hearts,
Whom in their earthly and corporeal state
You would behold again ?

Bar. Woman, beware !

Mat. Thy wife, shall I revive her ? Speak !

Bar. Away !

Mat. Be she in Heav'n or Hell, I'll bring her
to thee—

Scatter'd throughout the ocean, I'll reknit
Her sea-bleach'd bones, put living flesh upon them,
Light up her eyeless sockets with twin stars,
Bid the warm blood rush thro' her kindling veins,
And her heart beat with new created life ;
A breathing woman she shall stand before thee,
And thou, in freezing horror and amazement,
Shalt look more like a corse unshrouded.

Fitz. Nay, my Lord—

You let the wild words of this foolish beldam
Take too strong a hold upon you.

Mat. I have promis'd, Sir,
And to the very height of expectation
I will fulfil my pledge. (*They bring in FLORENCE.*)

Bar. Who have you there?

Vass. A lad whom we found lurking at the cottage

Fitz. 'Tis time to end this foolery. (*Aside.*)

Bar. Speak, boy :

What led you to the dwelling of that woman?

Flor. I had heard mention of her wond'rous skill

In divination, and I sorely long'd

To put her to the proof—for I myself

Can tell of things to come—command that no one Stir from this spot, till I have told my story.

Fitz. What can this mean (*aside*), My Lord? you will not hear him ;

He hath confess'd himself to be inspir'd,

Which, by the tenor of the law, is death.

Flor. Forbear a moment, I will tell you that Shall make your blood start back upon your heart,

And all your senses pause entranced with wonder—

To night, to-night—

Bar. What will befall to-night?

Flor. Nay at this moment, a foul plot is hatching,

Whose birth will be the death of all thine house,
Thy Castle walls, breaking their peaceful silence,
E'er the cock crow, will shriek to rape and murder.

I say this very hour, almost before

The bell of night breaks off the gossip's tale,

A fierce banditti will besiege your Castle—

Look to the Northern gate, for there they'll enter,

Fitz. Peace, beardless prophet !—I will hear no more—

It is a scandal to my holy office,
 A miserable waste of precious time,
 And an enormous blasphemy against reason,
 To listen to the lunatic discourse
 Of this audacious boy.

Flor. Why, holy father,
 I didn't say thy cloak conceal'd a villain,
 Tho' saintly outsides sometimes mask foul hearts;
 But for those minstrels yonder, you will find
 They are not what they seem.

Bar. Search them. (*They strip off the Robbers disguise.*)

Fitz. All's lost. (*Aside.*)
 Curse on the hag, how narrowly she eyes me.

(*Observing Matilda looking at him.*)

Mat. Some villain, on my life (*Aside.*)

Flor. What think you now, Sir?

(*To Fitzharding.*)

Fitz. I am struck mute with wonder.

Mat. (*Aside.*) With strong guilt.

(*They bring forward the Robbers.*)

Bar. Speak, wretches, or the torture shall
 wring from ye
 Who, and what you are.

1st Rob. Let your prophet tell you; 'tis bad
 policy when rogues betray each other, but he
 must be a fool indeed that turns evidence against
 himself.

2d Rob. That we come upon no charitable de-
 sign our present appearance speaks--that's all the
 information you'll get from me.

3d Rob. Or from me.

Bar. Take them away, and watch them carefully.

[*The Robbers are carried off.*]

What have you more to tell us? [*To Florence.*]

Flor. Nothing, Sir,

Bar. How!

Flor. For your safety I have said enough.
Should I more circumstantially relate
The means which have possess'd me of this secret
I may betray myself—urge me no further:
What I have said will happen—My tir'd spirits
Have need of rest.

Bar. (*to Vassals*) Attend, and wait his bidding.

Flor. One thing I had forgot—amongst the
band
That will beset your Castle, there is one
A tall fresh-colour'd youth, his curling hair
Black as the raven, but the truest mark
That shall denote him to you, is a scar
On his right cheek.

Mat. My son! (*Aside.*)

Flor. Upon your lives
Touch not a hair of him. As you would shun
The pangs of deep contrition, and remorse
Indelible: have mercy on that youth.
You shall know more hereafter.

[*Exit. with Vassals.*]

Bar. Is't not strange? (*to Fitzharding.*)

Fitz. Most wonderful—that may recover all.
(*Aside.*)

Bar. There must be something in it. For
this woman,
Whom vulgar clamour only hath accus'd,
And no particular grievance, she is free,

Mat. Touching my skill to raise again the
dead,

You shall have full conviction.

Bar. Well, to-morrow.

Mat. Perhaps to-night.

This priest and I must have some conference.

(*Aside.*) [*Exit with Vassals.*]

Bar. To night? what can she mean?

Fitz. Some things I've studied,

But I profess not to interpret woman.

Bar. I am confounded with these mysteries.

Fitz. Why 'tis a night of riddles—Tho' not
apt

To trust foreboding tales of dreaming wizards,
And quake myself into an ague-fit,
When toothless hags have mumbled prophecies
I cannot chuse but wonder.

Bar. 'Tis most clear
Some foul play is intended.

Fitz. I'm afraid so.

Bar. I'll have those minstrels rack'd until the
truth

Be forc'd from their keen tortures.

Fitz. Hold, my Lord—

No doubt they have deserv'd the sharpest jus-
tice—

But they are stubborn villains, men of steel
Who with clench'd teeth will smile at your in-
flections,

And mock your bloody executioner.

Or if they should confess, can you believe
them?

Truth is not to be torn from tortur'd limbs;
Its dwelling is the heart, and he who knows
Deepest to sound the heart, has found the key
to't.

Have you not heard of most abandon'd wretches,
 Desp'rate as savage beasts in their wild courses,
 Dead to all punishment of pain or shame,
 Who in a dark and solitary cell,
 Whence stern reflection will not be shut out,
 And the persuasive rhetorick of the church,
 Have felt compunction creep upon their na-
 tures,

And melting into penitence and shame,
 Unbosom'd all their guilt?—Such men are these:
 Leave them to my discretion—presently
 I'll bring you the full scope of their intents,
 Or else the wide spread fame I have acquir'd
 For holy influence o'er the minds of men
 Is built on no foundation—

Bar. You shall try them.

Fitz. I'll touch their conscience to the quick,
 depend on't;

There is a sacred something here within,
 Whispers a prosperous issue.

Bar. Speed you well—
 I will but give directions to my vassals,
 And here attend you.

Fitz. You may soon expect me.—

[*Exit Baron.*]

So constant spirits draw safety from their dan-
 gers.

Enter MATILDA.

This woman still—Your bus'ness?—I'm in haste.

Mat. No friar art thou.

Fitz. If not, what is't to thee?

Mat. It is a lonely spot that you have chosen
 For a mysterious work.

Fitz. 'Twill suit the purpose.

Mat. A ruffian hour—what holy purpose is't
That the sun must not look upon?

Fitz. A deed
That better suits the winking eye of night.

Mat. Some horrid meaning lives in your dark
looks—

I mark'd you at th' unmasking of the minstrels,
It was not mere surprize that shook you thro',
But the strong stir of guilty apprehension,
That trembled in the paleness of your cheek,
And fix'd you horror-struck.

Fitz.—I am their Captain—
You know me now—but build not upon that—
Your son—

Mat. What of him?

Fitz. Safe within my gripe
He pants an easy prey—observe me well :—
We hold him on strong grounds, a recreant traitor

To this night's enterprize, which if it fail—
If by design or chance (no matter which)
Aught lights on me untoward to my hopes,
He dies on the instant.

Mat. Heavenly powers protect him !

Fitz. It works as I cou'd wish (*aside*)—therefore be wise—

As for this foolish baron and his fate,
'Tis not within the compass of thy spells—
For vainly seeking to enfranchise him,
You will yourself entangle—Keep aloof,
Home to your hovel and your housewif'ry,
And when the bell of night has toll'd his summons,

Keep not abroad—there will be mischief stirring
Which 'twill behove thee better to avoid

Than pry into—
Thy son; remember, he but draws his breath
Whilst I walk harmless.—Home, and be advis'd.

[*Exit.*

Mat. Thus on a double precipice I stand,
And either way must fall—Ye sacred guards
Of innocence, some portion of your pow'r
Breathe into me, that something may be done
To save the father, yet preserve the son. [*Exit.*

ACT V.

SCENE I. *The dark Part of the Forest.—The Curfew is heard tolling at a Distance.*

(*Enter ARMSTRONG, CONRAD, and ROBBERS.*)

Arm. All's dark as pitch—

Robber. And still as death—you may hear the falling of a leaf.—As we pass'd the gallows of Rodolpho, methought he mutter'd vengeance.

Arm. Ay, lads, for his sake give no quarter—remember they are Normans who have spoil'd us of our inheritance, and chased us into this forest, where, like wolves, they have set a price upon our heads.

Con. That's out of compliment to our understandings; 'tis not every man's head that will bear to have a price set upon it.

Arm. Are we worry'd like beasts. and shall we not turn upon our hunters? Remember, I say, they are Normans, and spare not.

Con. Right, noble commander :—If after to-morrow's sun-rise, a flea be seen to hop in the Castle, or there be left life in an unhatch'd egg, 'twill be a slovenly performance.

Arm. Hark ! Who comes ?

(ROBBER *without*)

1st Rob. Nay, answer you—

Arm. Oswald?

(*Enter the THREE ROBBERS from the CASTLE.*)

1st Rob. The same. Well met, lads.

Arm. Have you been discover'd then?

1st Rob. Yes, but the Captain remains snug, and will redeem every thing—the bell has gone—the whole village lies in a profound sleep—The Baron is lull'd into security, and our game is a sure one.—Follow me, and you shall learn the rest as we proceed.

Arm. On then.—

(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II.—*The Castle.—A Chapel, in the
Midst of which appears a Tomb.*

(*Enter the BARON and FITZHARDING.*)

Bar. This is the place.

Fitz. Are we secure from interruption?

Bar. None, on their lives, dare enter.

Fitz. It is well—

The silent melancholy of this spot
Will suit our ceremony.

Bar. And the moon,
When from the clouds which now oppress her
brightness

She breaks into full majesty again,
Will shed a solemn lustre o'er our purpose.

Fitz. We need not wait for her.

Bar. Now then unfold

Why with such mystic preparation,
At this dark hour and unfrequented spot
We are alone together?

Fitz. Can you doubt?

Your crime was murder, and it has been said,
Blood will have blood.

Bar. What mean you?

Fitz. Such a deed
Cries for no common penance: whining pray'rs,
Self-castigation, wasting abstinence,
A galling pilgrimage twice round the world,
Your wealth whilst living all consum'd in alms,
Or left, when dead, to raise up hospitals,
These things will not absolve you from an act,
Which has but one atonement.

Bar. Name it.

Fitz. Death. (*Discovers himself.*)

Bar. Ha!—What art thou? Some villain in
disguise?

Fitz. Stir not, nor raise thy voice—'twill be
thy knell.—

Has time defac'd me with so rude a hand.
That you have quite forgot me?

Bar. Speak—who are you?

Fitz. D'ye know me now? (*stripping his arm.*)

Bar. Fitzharding, and alive?

Fitz. I am no apparition—look again
If your eyes doubt it, you shall feel me soon—
The woman promised you to raise the dead—
I have perform'd it.

Bar. Wonder-working pow'rs!
Yet wherefore do we meet as enemies?

Fitz. Wherefore?

I think thou art the self-same man
Who some time since in Normandy a valiant troop
Commanded; into which, being then a boy,

In a wild fit of spleen, I madly enter'd,—
 And of the meanest soldier bore the toil.—
 In angry mood, once, publicly thou gav'st me
 Some sharp rebuke, which I as sharply answer'd ;
 For this, didst thou condemn me to be branded
 As the most common felon, with a spirit
 Unworthy of a soldier, nay, a man,
 A sullen savage sensuality
 Of vengeance ; in the public market place,
 Beneath the full blaze of a mid-day sun,
 Where all the scum and rabble of the place
 By ling'ring preparation were collected
 To make their vulgar comments—there it was
 This badge of infamy was fix'd upon me.

Bar. It was a galling wrong, but thou forgav'st it.

Fitz. I seemingly forgave it—thou believ'dst me,

And when thou held'st me to thy cred'lous breast
 I did not strangle thee.—We drank together,
 And still I mix'd no poison with thy wine.
 Alone, at midnight, o'er a dreary heath
 Have we pass'd—on the extremest verge
 Of a sea-impending cliff, yet I abstain'd.—
 Ask me why, thus so often strangely tempted,
 I have withheld the blow?—'Twas not in mercy ;—

Say, was not this an honourable scar

(*Stripping his arm.*)

To stamp upon a young and gallant soldier?
 A shame which on my body is so fix'd
 That I must be half rotted in my grave
 Ere death can cancel it.—Thou thought'st me
 dead,

And so I was to all but my revenge.

The man whom thou did'st find in thy wife's chamber

Was I.—The letters sent to thee were mine;
 And often under terrible affliction,
 When thou hast bow'd to Heav'n's mysterious
 chiding,
 This arm, like thunder from a cloud, has reach'd
 thee.

Bar. And are you not content ?

Fitz. No jot appeased !

Tho' I should kill thee with extremest torture,
 To 'suage the burning thirst of my revenge—
 Drink thy blood life-warm ; tear those trembling
 limbs,
 And scatter them as whirlwinds strew the dust ;
 Mid the triumphant pantings of my soul,
 Vengeance would weep to think thy pangs were
 mortal.

Think'st thou thy life, for thou must quickly
 die,

Will make me reparation ?

Bar. Spare it then !

Fitz. Thou hast no reasonable hope for
 mercy,

Thou can'st not have,—for when on my behalf
 Petitions throng'd, thou with a sneer replyd'st—
 “ He shall have justice ”—Justice then o'ertake
 thee.

Bar. Help ! Murder !—villain ! help !

*[He is pursued by Fitzharding.—Matilda from the Tomb interposes
 between them.]*

Fitz. (*starting back.*) What art thou, speak ?
 The real existence of a living woman,
 Or but the mind's creation of a form,
 That night and this occasion conjure up,
 To fright me from my steady resolution ?

It has no human faculty of speech,
And cannot from that attitude relax,
To which 'tis spell-bound.

*[She strikes with her foot, and some
of the vassals enter.]*

Foild at last?
And by a woman?

Mat. Seize on that ruffian, and convey him
hence.

Fitz. Well, well, the night's not over.
[The Vassals bear him off.]

Mat. (to the Baron.) Yet amaz'd?

Bar. My flesh creeps still, and my uncurdling
blood

Slowly and fearfully resumes its functions.
Whate'er thou art—Mortal, or blessed spirit,
Thy voice familiar, doth proclaim the first;
But the strange apparition of that form,
Almost persuades the other; who within
The sanctuary of that hallow'd spot intomb'd
thee,

That at the very crisis of my fate,
Thou should'st burst forth in terrible array,
To stagger resolute murder, and make reel
Destruction back upon itself.

Mat. Survey me.

I am the very substance of that form,
Whose apparition I do only feign.
The woman, whom you least expect to meet:
That once you dearly lov'd, now deeply mourn,
That you would most desire, yet least dare hope
for,
Now stands before you.

Bar. If'twere possible.

Mat. What, that among so many sinking
souls

One should be sav'd ?

Bar. Remembrance steals upon me—

The look, the voice, yes, yes, thou art my wife !
And the wild waves were merciful.

Mat. Speak for me,

The silent rapture of these starting tears,
These arms, that eager open to enfold thee,
And clasp thee with more transport to my heart.
Than from the roaring sea, they snatch'd our child.
[*They embrace.*]

Bar. This is to live anew ! our son survives
too ?

Mat. He lives, but—

Bar. What ? proceed—

Enter VASSAL.

The matter, Sir ?

Vas. My Lord, the castle is attack'd.

Mat. Fear nothing !

I have prepared your vassals to receive them.

Bar. I will myself among them :—in the mean
time

Within the friendly covert of the tomb,
Rest you secured, till the rude conflict's past.

Mat. That must not be, I will along with you,
For what remains to do, may want my help.

Bar. Come, let us on then. (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE III. *An Apartment in the Castle.*

A Skirmish between the VASSALS and the ROBBERS, who are driven back and pursued.—ROBERT enters, pursued by the BARON.

Bar. Then yield thee, villain!

[They fight, ROBERT is overcome, and falls—the BARON is on the point of killing him—MATILDA interposes.]

Mat. Forbear, it is thy son!

Robt.—My father!

Bar. Holy pow'rs!

Mat. Disown him not;

Tho' he appear in this rude character,

He is no reprobate confirm'd.

Bar. My son! *(they embrace.)*

Robt. In this the hand of Heav'n is most miraculous—

Had I ne'er fall'n into this deep disgrace,
Destruction would e'er this have whelm'd you all:
The arrow, which I shot into the castle—

Bar. Well, what of that?—

Robt. It bore the full intent
Of our dark enterprize.

Bar. Indeed!

Robt. Most truly.

Bar. Why then the priests' confusion is unriddled: *(aside)*

It was well meant, but by a subtle turn,
Which you shall know hereafter, miss'd its object.
But see, our prisoners—

[Fitz-harding, and the rest of the robbers, are brought in by the vassals, headed by Bertrand.]

Thou unhappy man, (*to Fitz-harding*)
 Who by thine own deep malice art betray'd,
 What answer wilt thou make to justice?

Fitz. None.—

For nothing of my purpose, but it's failure,
 Do I repent.

Bar. Will't live, and be my friend?

Fitz. Never! whilst I can die thine enemy.—
 What you have made me, still expect to find me:
 A man, struck from the common roll of men—
 Exil'd from all society; stamp't like Cain
 To wander savage and forlorn—why then
 Revenge be still my solitary comfort:
 By darkness and by daylight, my companion,
 My food, my sleep, my study, and my pastime;
 Pulse of my heart, and life of all my being:
 For till you can divorce me from myself,
 Or, put another soul into this body,
 You may as soon enthrone the fires of Heav'n,
 Or shake the rooted earth from its foundation,
 As alter me. Your friendship I disdain,—
 Despise your pow'r. My life I value not;
 For when you stabb'd my fame, you murder'd
 that

Which honourable men call life. The glow
 Of young ambition—The high swelling hope
 Of present glory, and renown immortal.—
 Beauty's soul thrilling smile, the social joys
 Of kindling friendship.——Out upon this softness.
 Come, lead me to the solace of a dungeon,
 Where I may curse him privately.

(*Exit with vassals.*)

Mat. How fix't
 And unrelenting in his enmity!

Bar. He may be wrought on yet. But for
 the rest,—

To morrow we will speak to them again.

(Exeunt ROBBERS with VASSALS.)

Bertrand, your hand. I thank you for this service,
Which shall not lack requital.

(Enter FLORENCE.)

My deliverer!

Flor. Am I a babbler now? A prating wizard?
Is fire or miry pool to be my portion?

Bar. Look round my wide domain with curious eye;

Whatever is most precious in thy sight,
There pause and ask it boldly.

Flor. Oh beware, Sir!

My wishes may be wilder than the dreams
Of doting avarice. I may demand
This princely habitation; or perhaps——

Bar. Ask what you will, by Holy Heav'n I swear

It shall be granted freely.

Flor. Then I fix
On this your humble vassal.

(Takes BERTRAND's hand.)

Here I kneel

And beg a father's, and, (for I have heard
The strange and tender tale) a mother's blessing.

Bar. Florence?

Flor. It is, indeed, Sir.

Bar. Rise, my girl;

Let me in my daughter, clasp my preserver.

(They embrace.)

Flor. Your child was your preserver;—but not I, Sir.

Being made pris'ner by that rude banditti,
I was deliver'd to my brother's hands
For sacrifice. But inly touch'd with pity,
As if instinctive nature held his hand,

He brought me thro' the dangers of the forest,
Safe from that horrid cavern.—There it was
I learnt to be a prophet.

Bar. Still new wonders !!

The sister by the brother's hand preserv'd,
The husband by the wife's!—Is there ought else,
Or have we reach'd, at length, the farthest maze
Of this eventful night? Come, let us in then,
And as we shake amazement from our senses,
Discourse more fully on these prodigies.

THE END.

EPILOGUE.

BY MRS. OPIE.

(Spoken by Miss DUNCAN.)

MAY I come forward? Do I friends behold?
Has not our Curfew then its own knell toll'd?
I fear'd our drama's name alone would fright ye,
Convinc'd no gothic customs could delight ye.
Fine whims indeed were in that monarch's head,
Who all his subjects sent at eight to bed;
Should modern rulers to such plans resort,
Alas! alas! 'twould spoil a world of sport.

Those were strange times!—for then the race of beaux
In cot, and palace, with the sun arose;
And stranger still, belles, for cosmetics, knew
Not the *Olympian*, but the *morning dew*.
From dawns chill breezes they their roses gain'd,
And queen o'er every thing, pure Nature reign'd;
Nay, such the ignorance of each untaught zany,
They follow'd *larks*, as we do,—Catalani.
What vulgar days! I'm glad they're pass'd away!
Then people slept all night, and wak'd all day;
To them unknown the eccentric, dear delight
To sleep all day, and visit all the night.
Unfelt by them the joy *our* fashion yields,
In *winter*, towns they sought, in *Summer*, fields;
But wiser, we such *natural* ways disown,
And cold months pass in *country*, hot in *town*:

EPILOGUE.

And tho' a walk at morn's refreshing hour
Might faded beauties native bloom restore,
All such receipts for bloom I deem a bubble,
When rouge, beyond dispute, is much less trouble :—
Thus I'm convinc'd all moderns truly wise,
Beyond the *past*, will *present* customs prize ;
And let me hope unenvying times that were,
You'll hate all curfews but the CURFEW HERE.

Yet, one word more :—by modern changes, witches
Have gain'd the most, for *now* their art enriches ;
Once, stripes, or death their recompence became,
While no one *wish'd* a *fortune-teller's* name ;
Then too in *huts* they liv'd—to us, that's novel !
We do not seek for witches in a *hovel* ;
We for such treasures, *streets*, and *squares* explore :
What splendid coaches throng a CERTAIN DOOR !
'Tis a good trade—I'll practise it I vow,
Nay, with your leave, I will begin it now—

(*After a pause, during which she looks round the house,*)

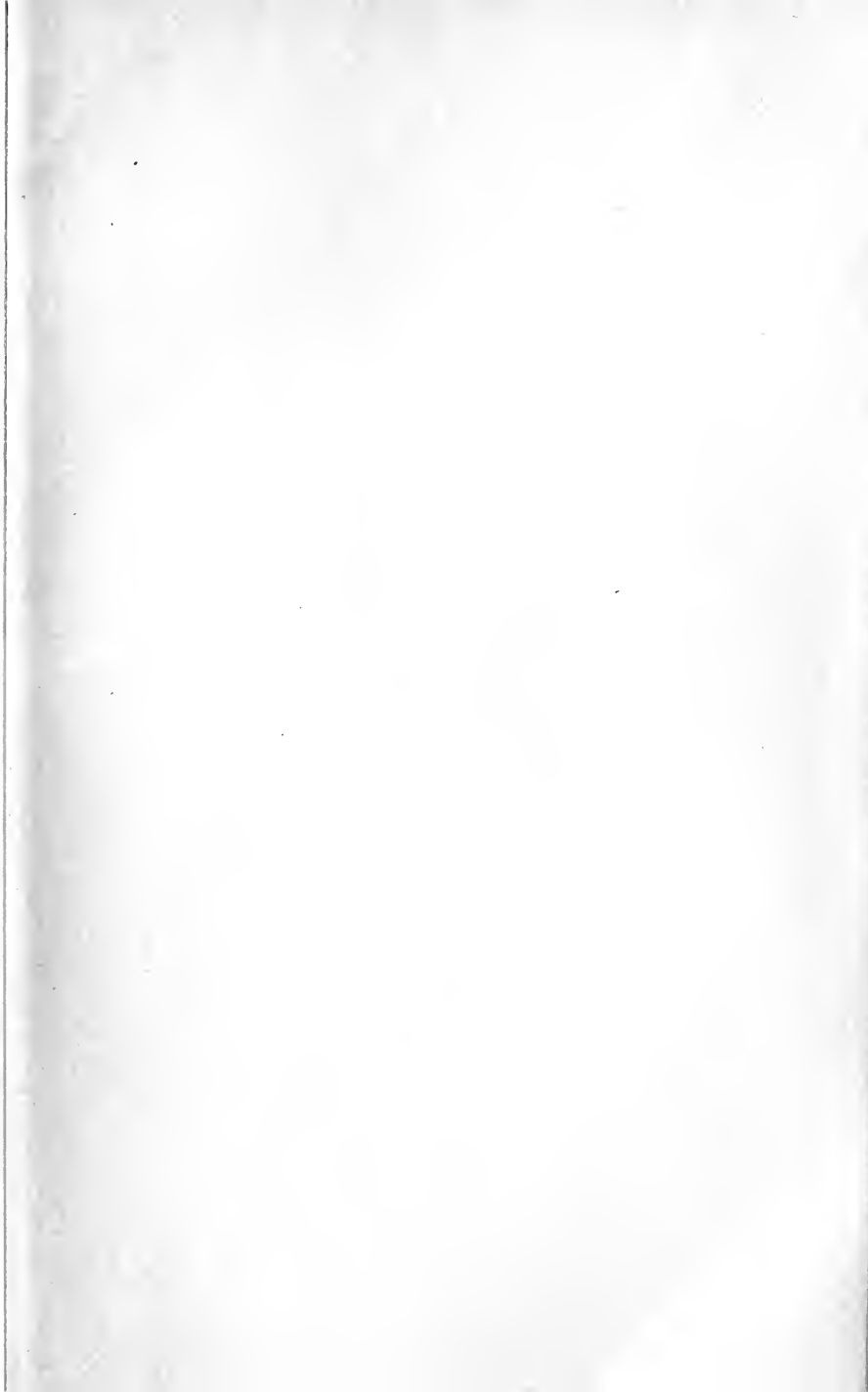
Our Author's fate, I in your faces read,
And dare foretell, our drama will succeed.---
Oh ! then, ye critics, if ye friendly feel,
What your *hearts* whisper, let your *hands* reveal,
Applaud, and prove me, what is not uncommon,
And quite the fashion now---a CUNNING WOMAN.



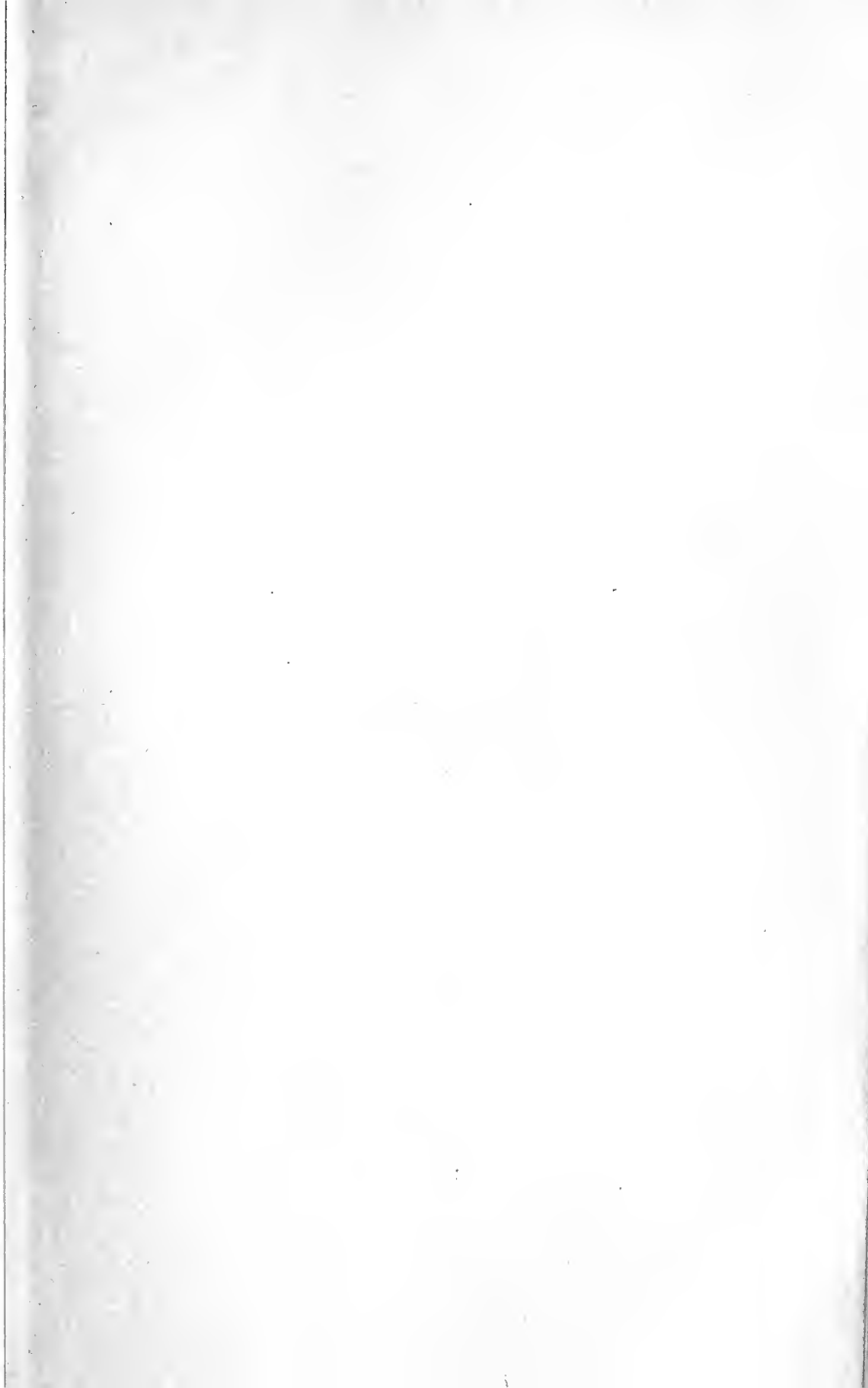








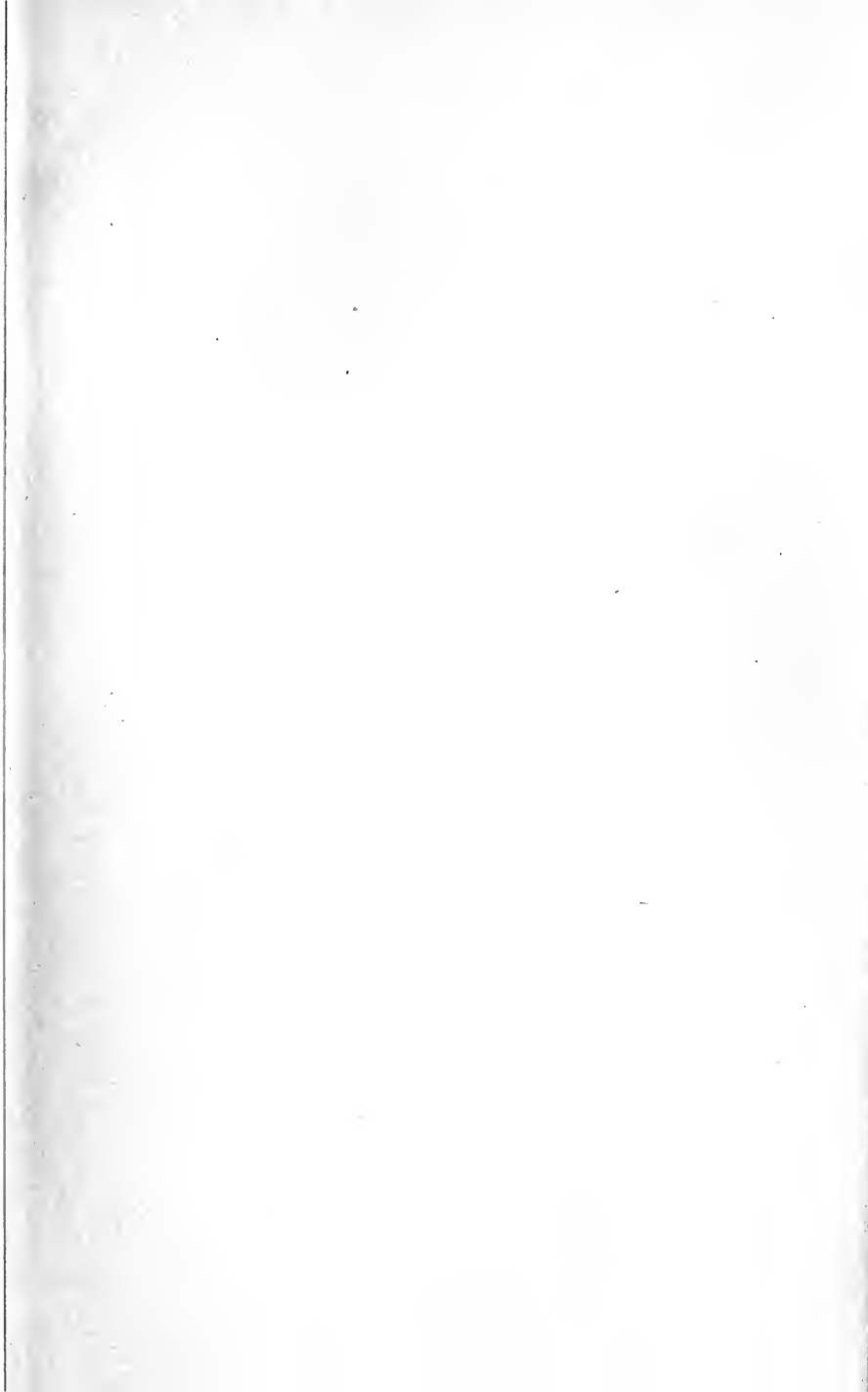




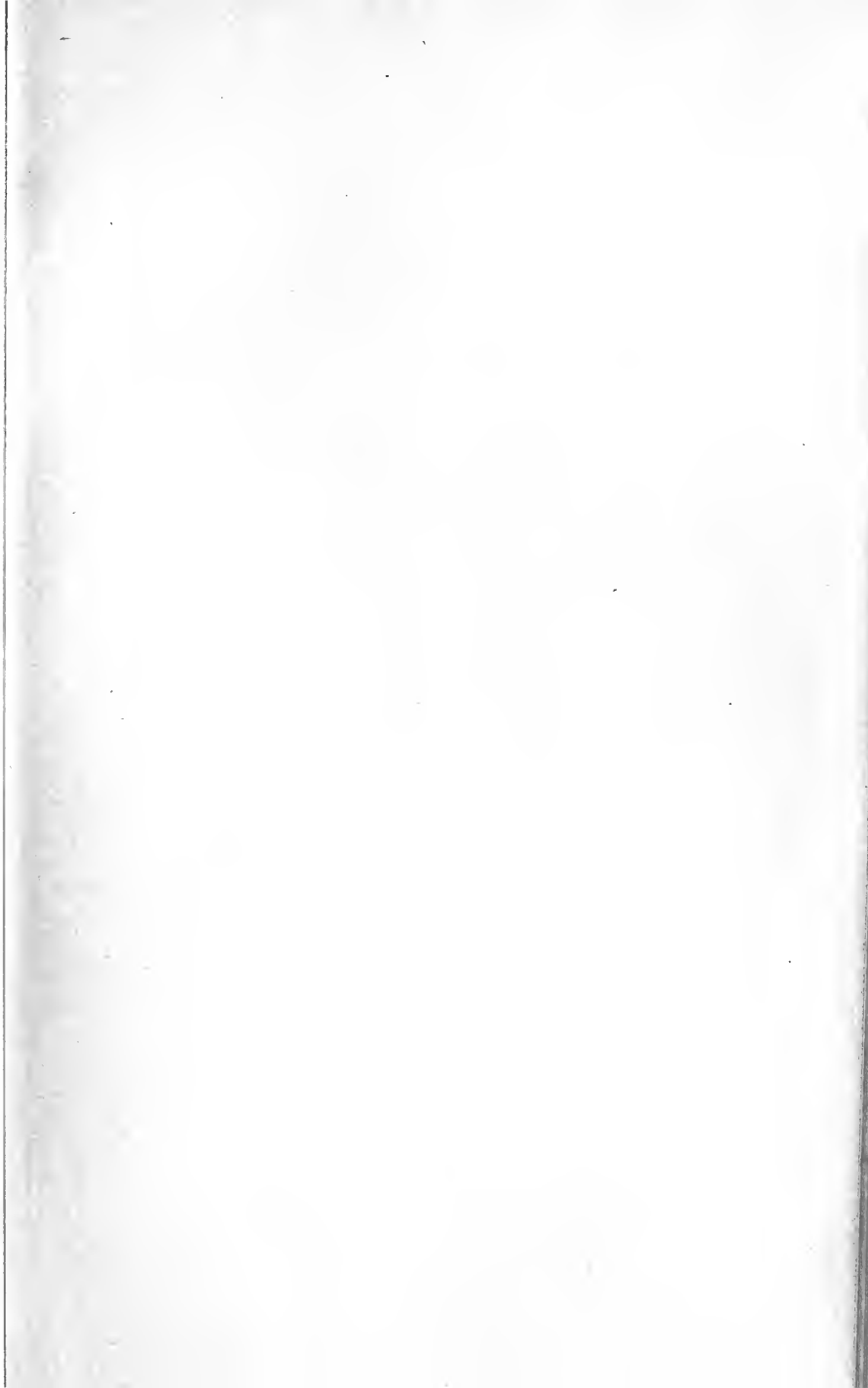




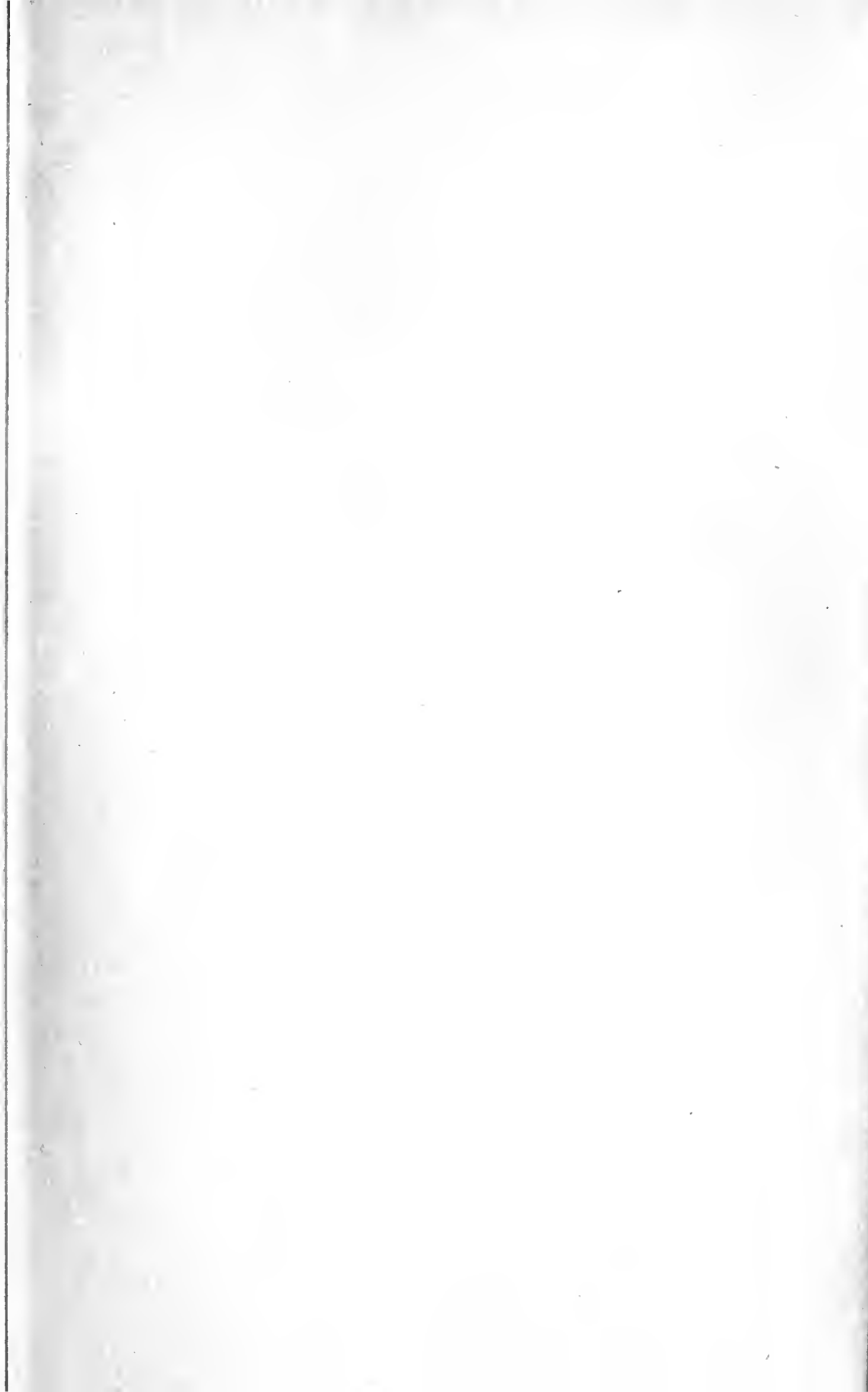














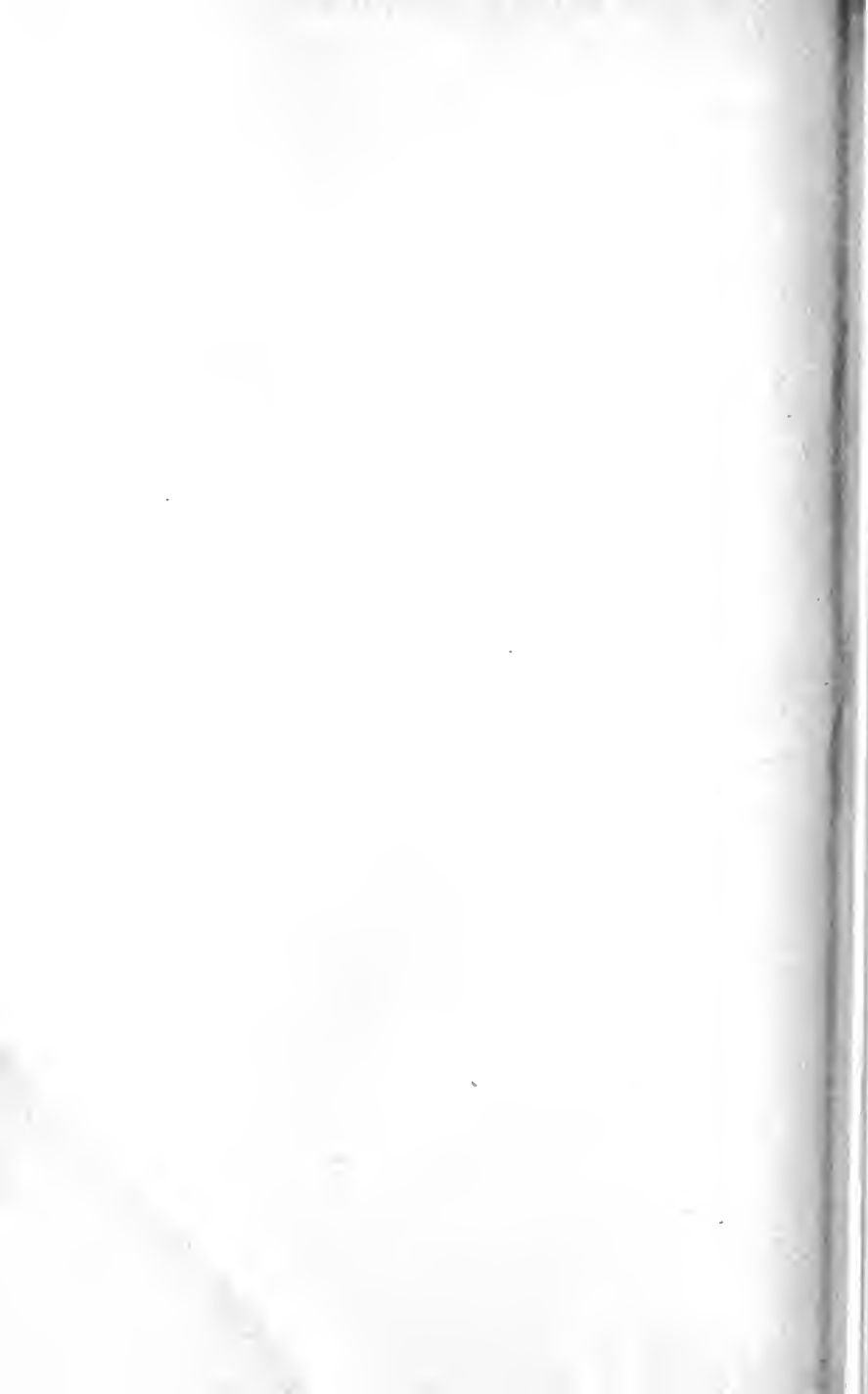


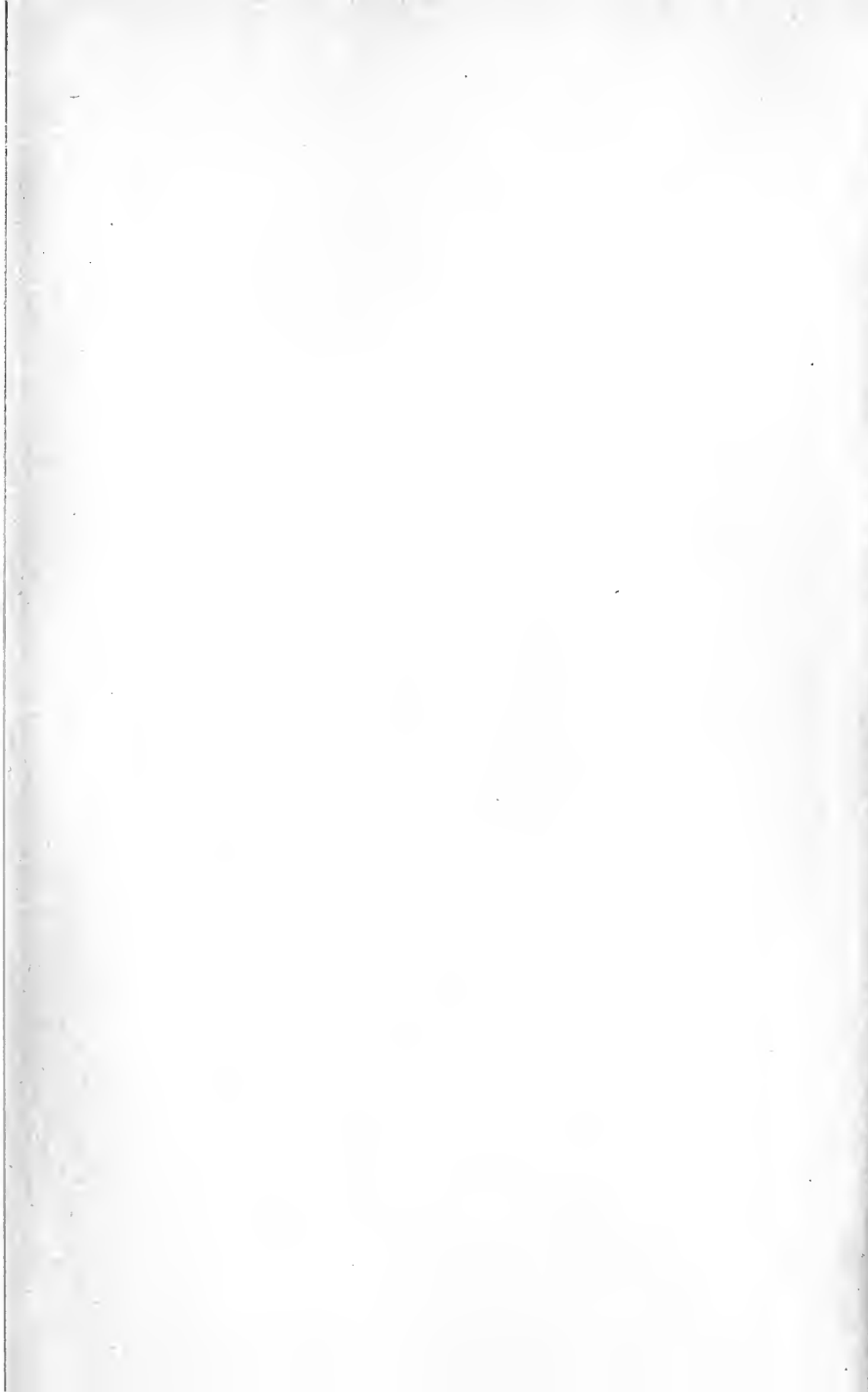








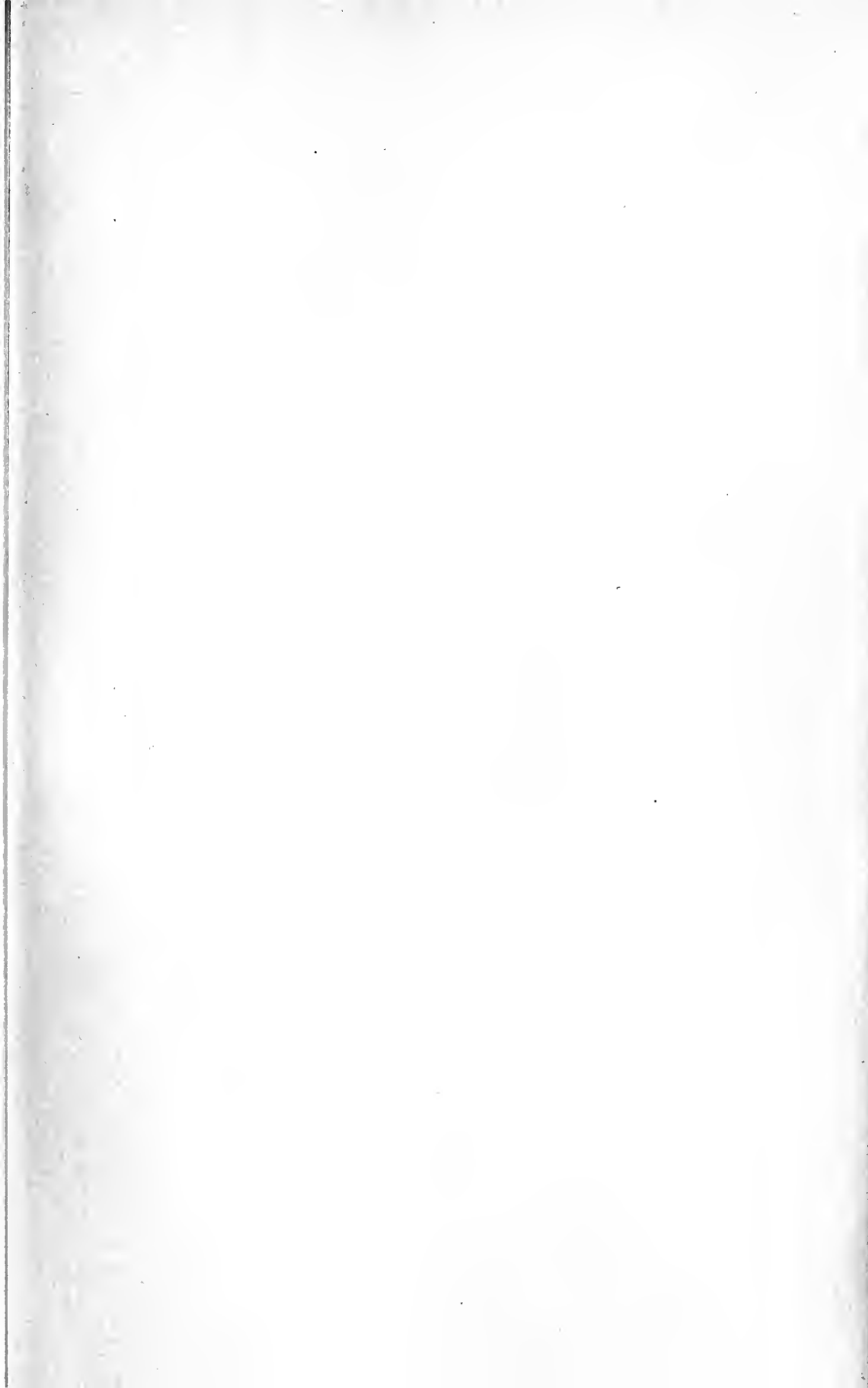










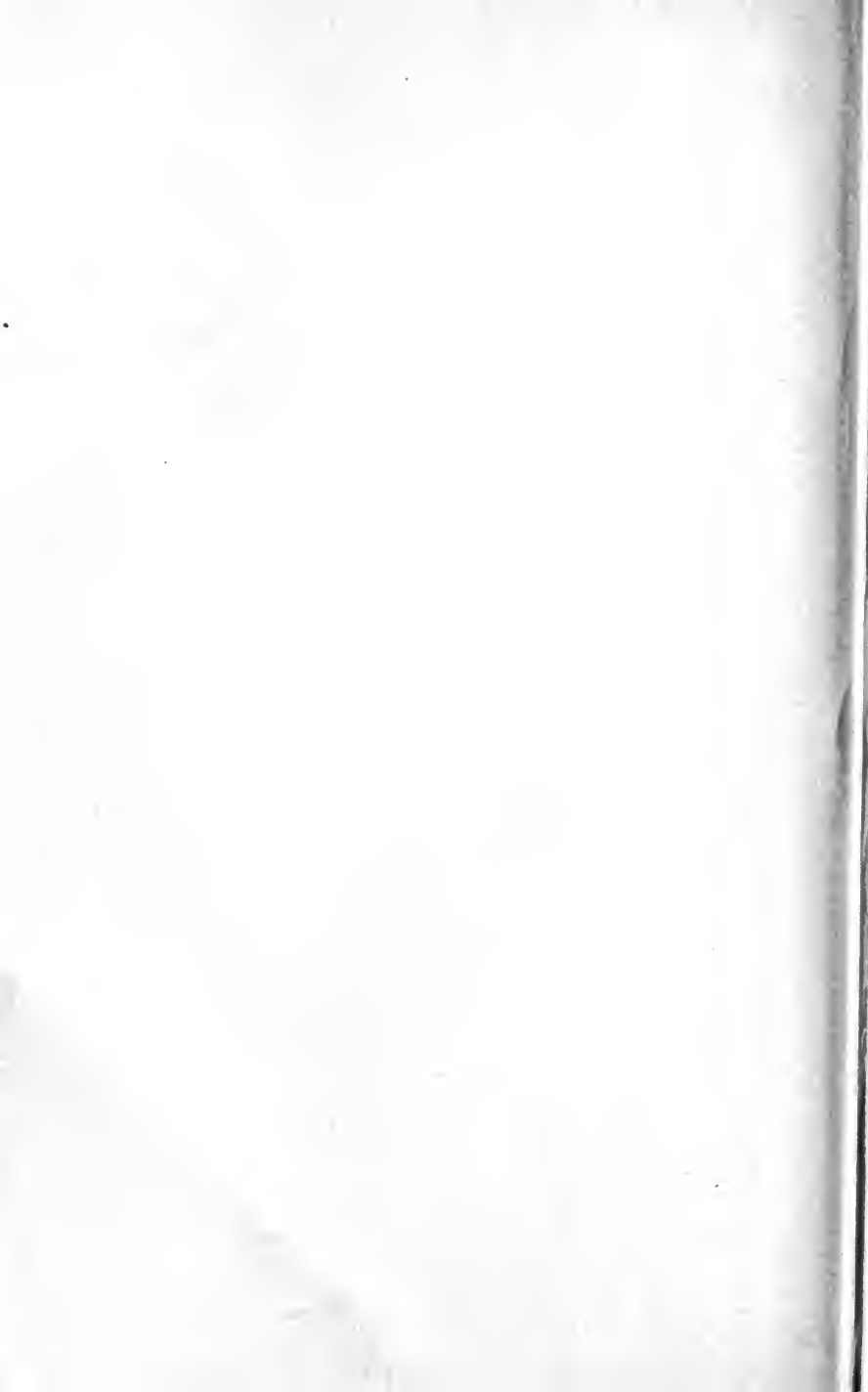


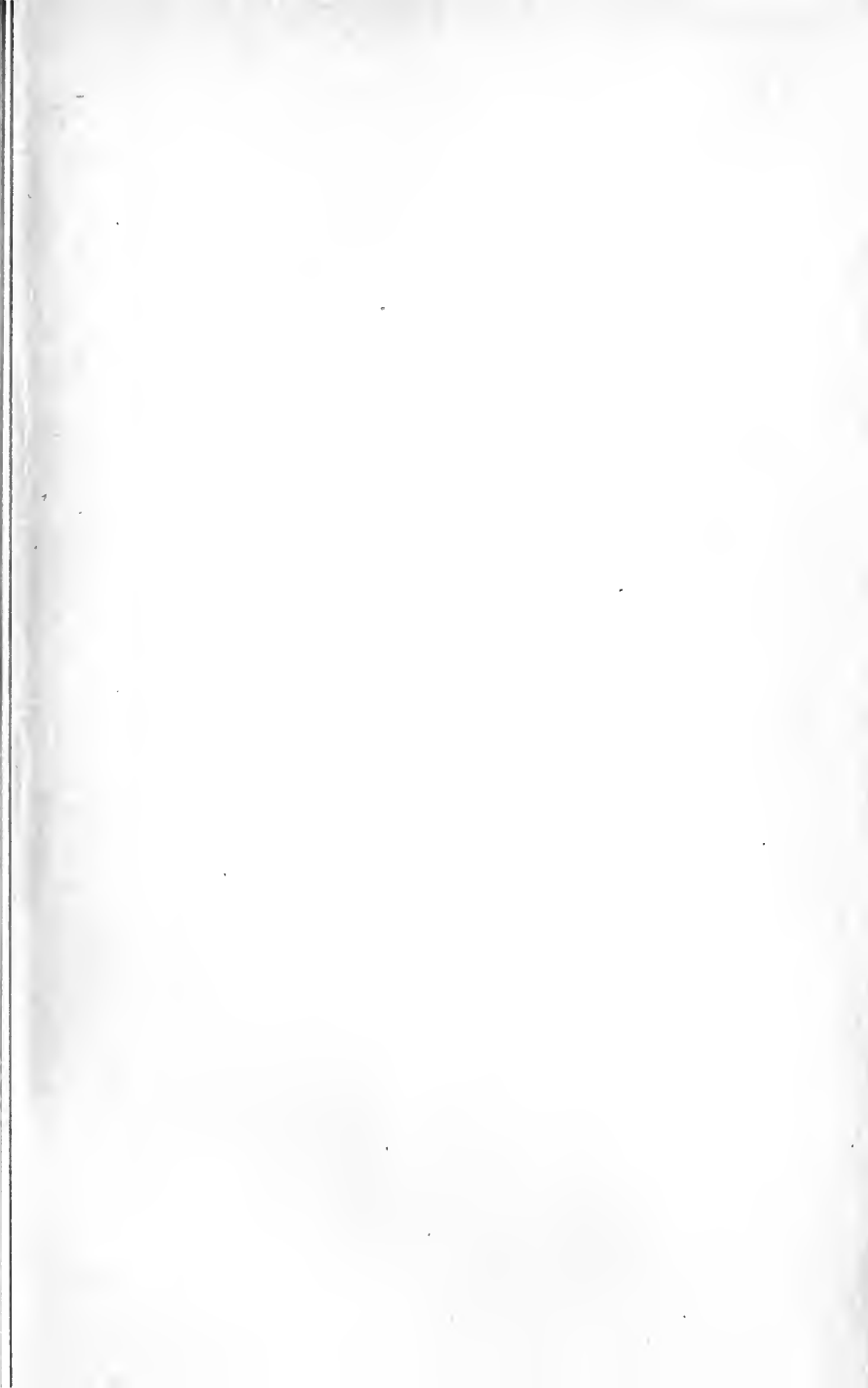








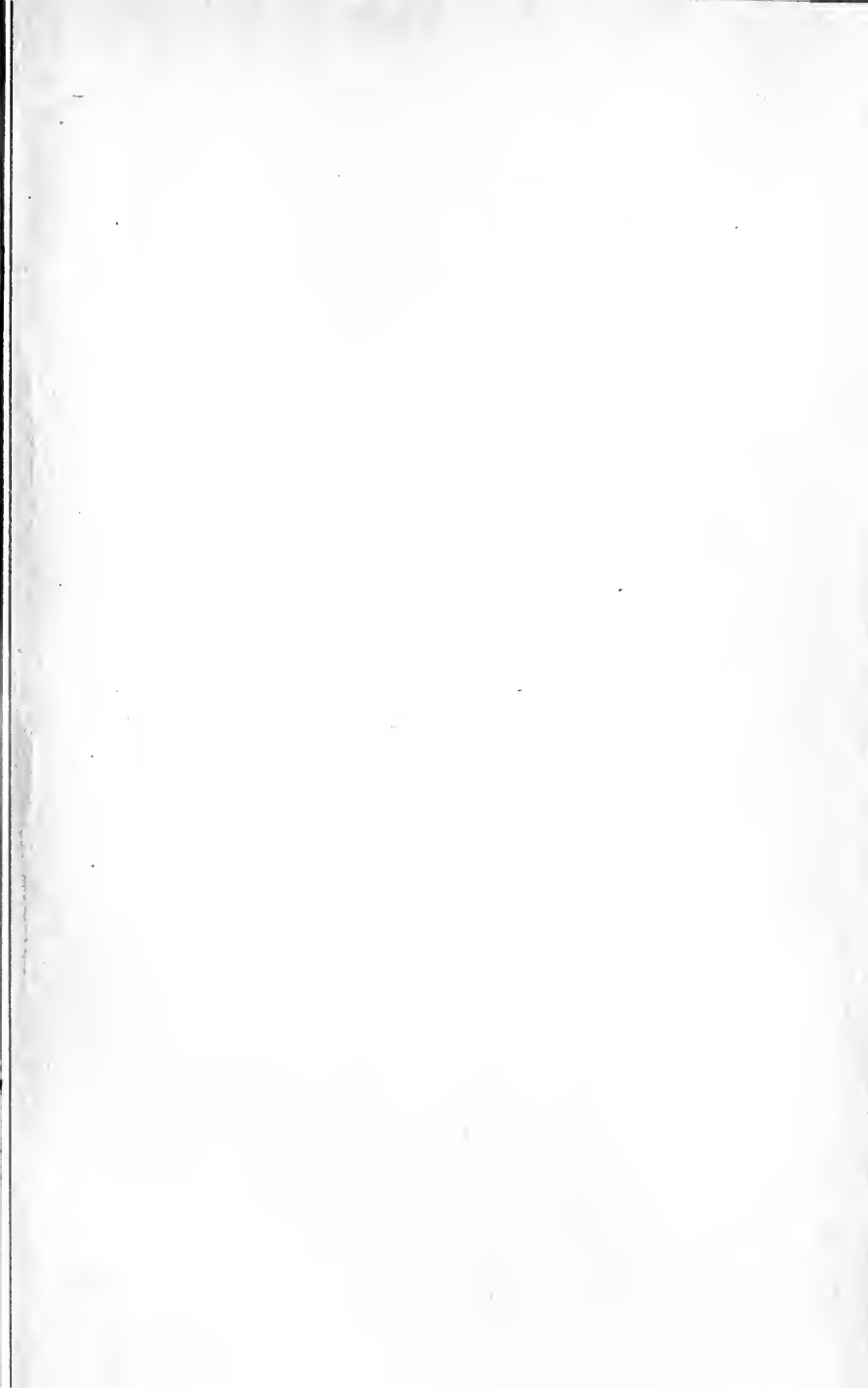




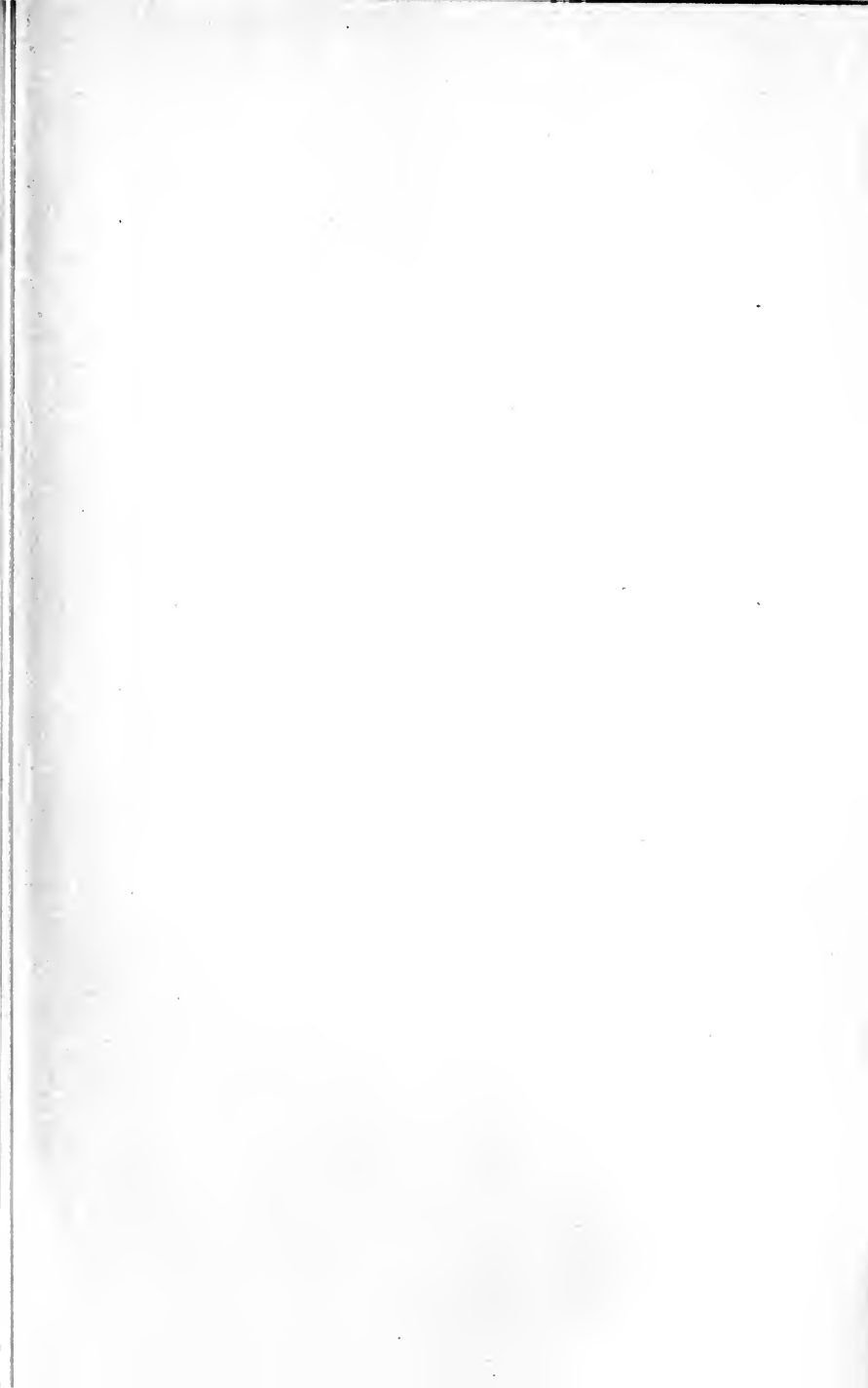








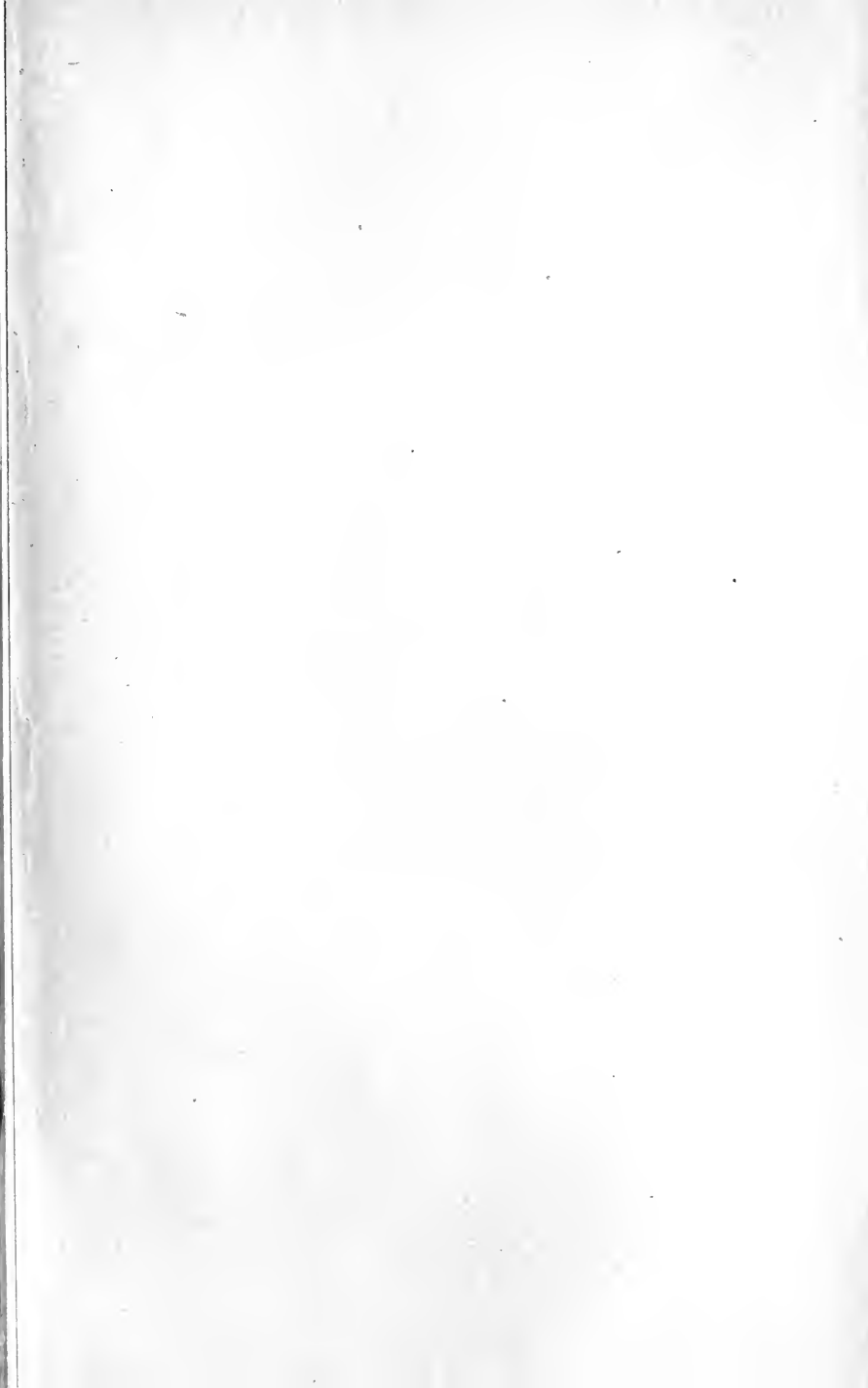




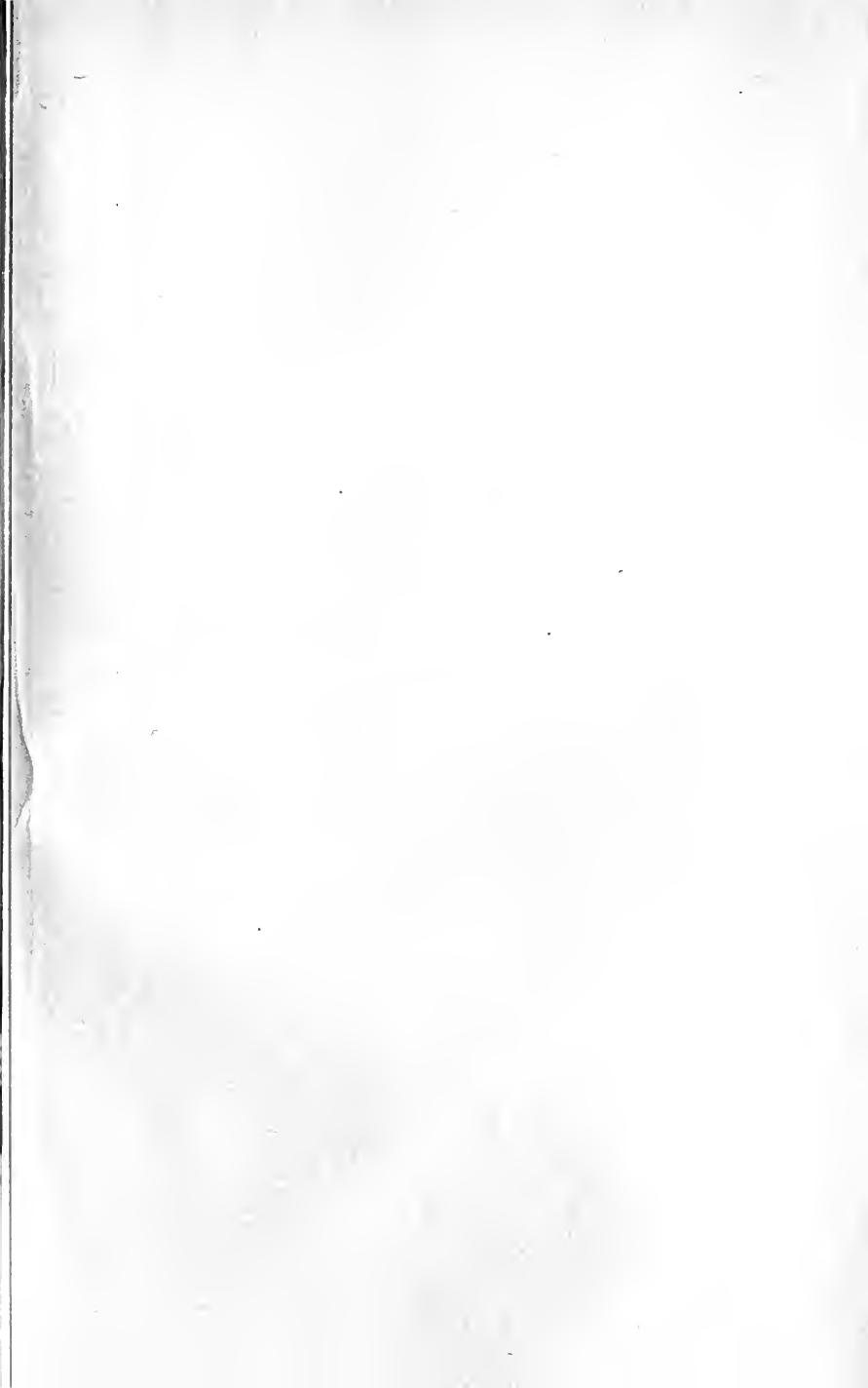




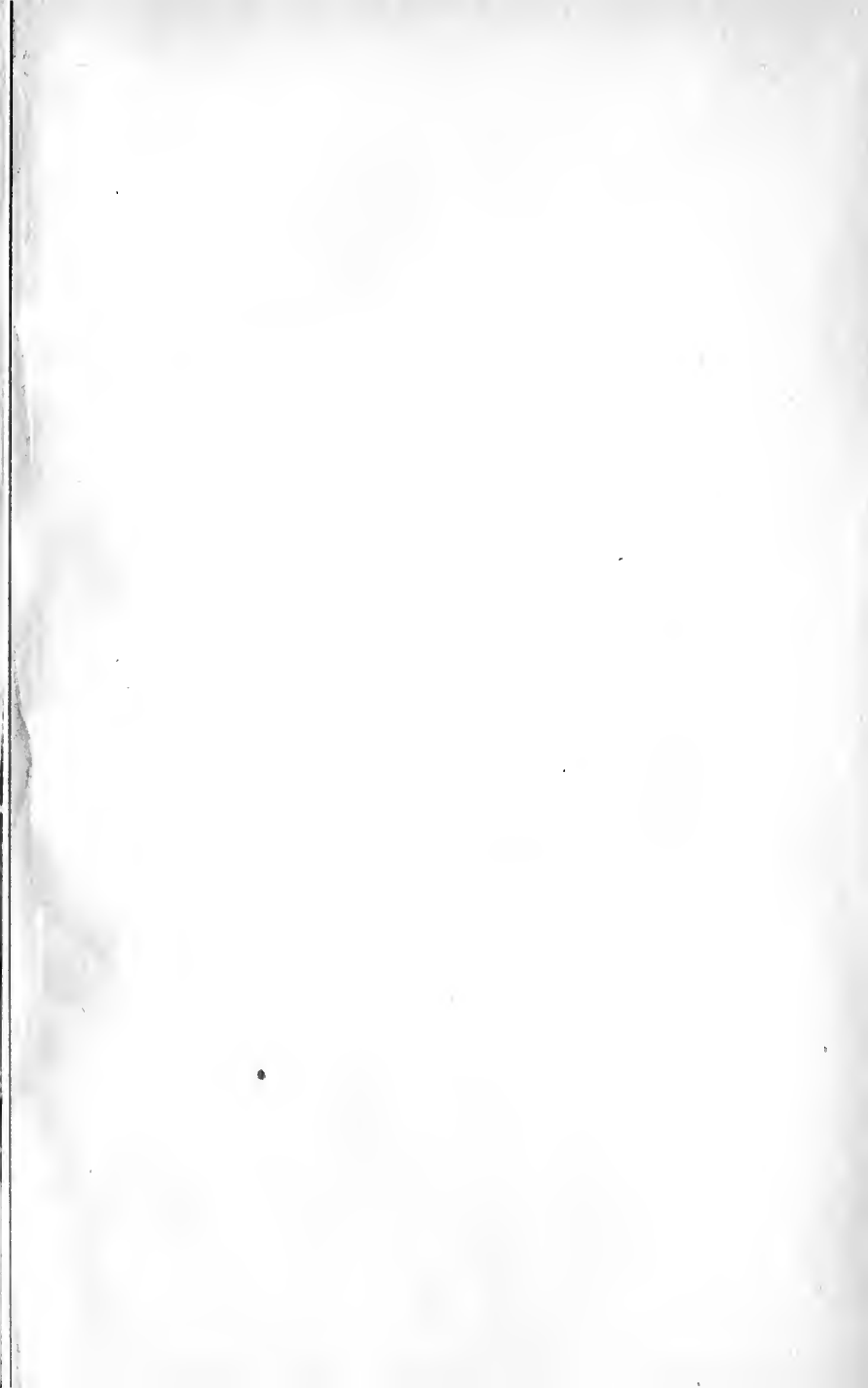




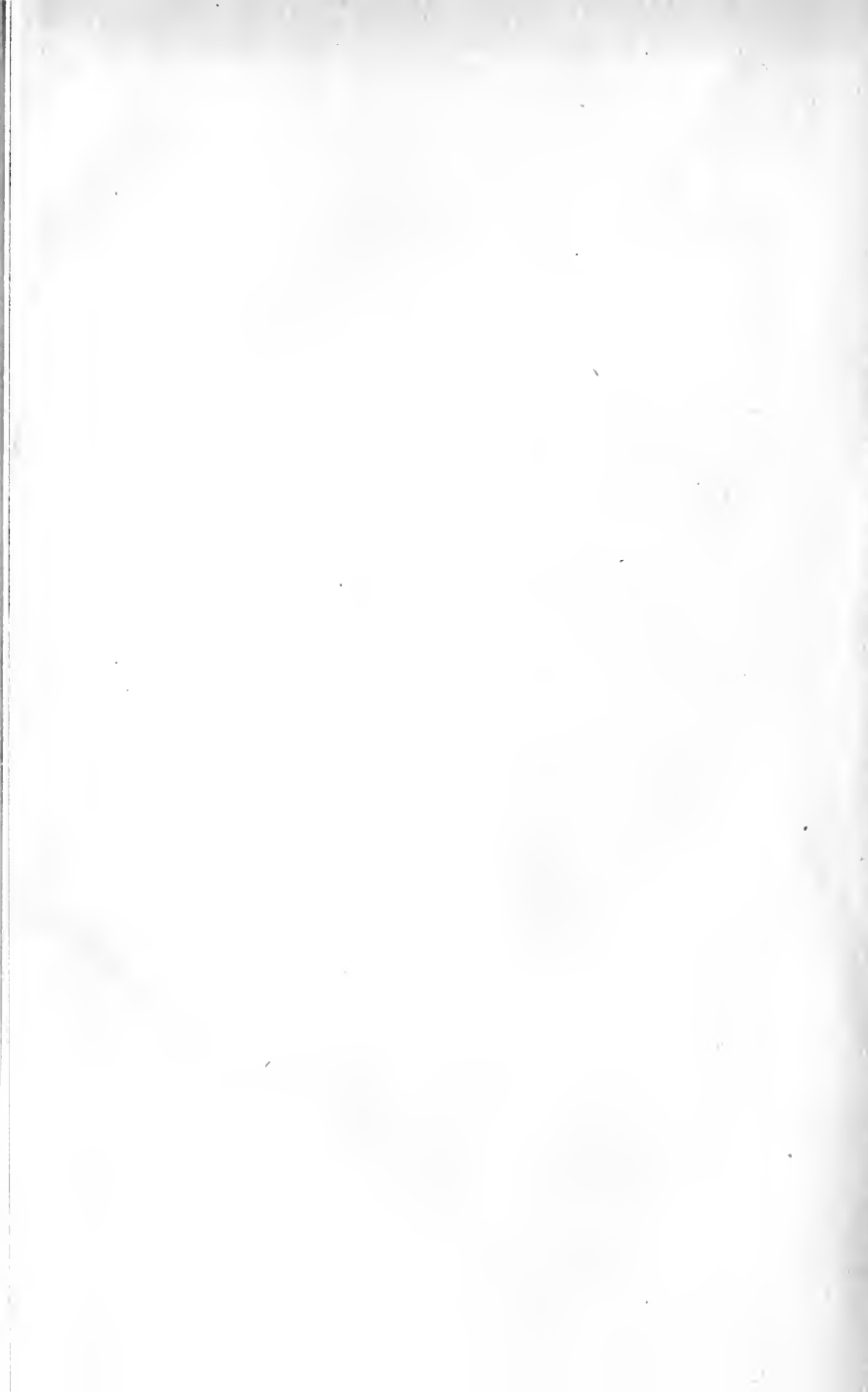


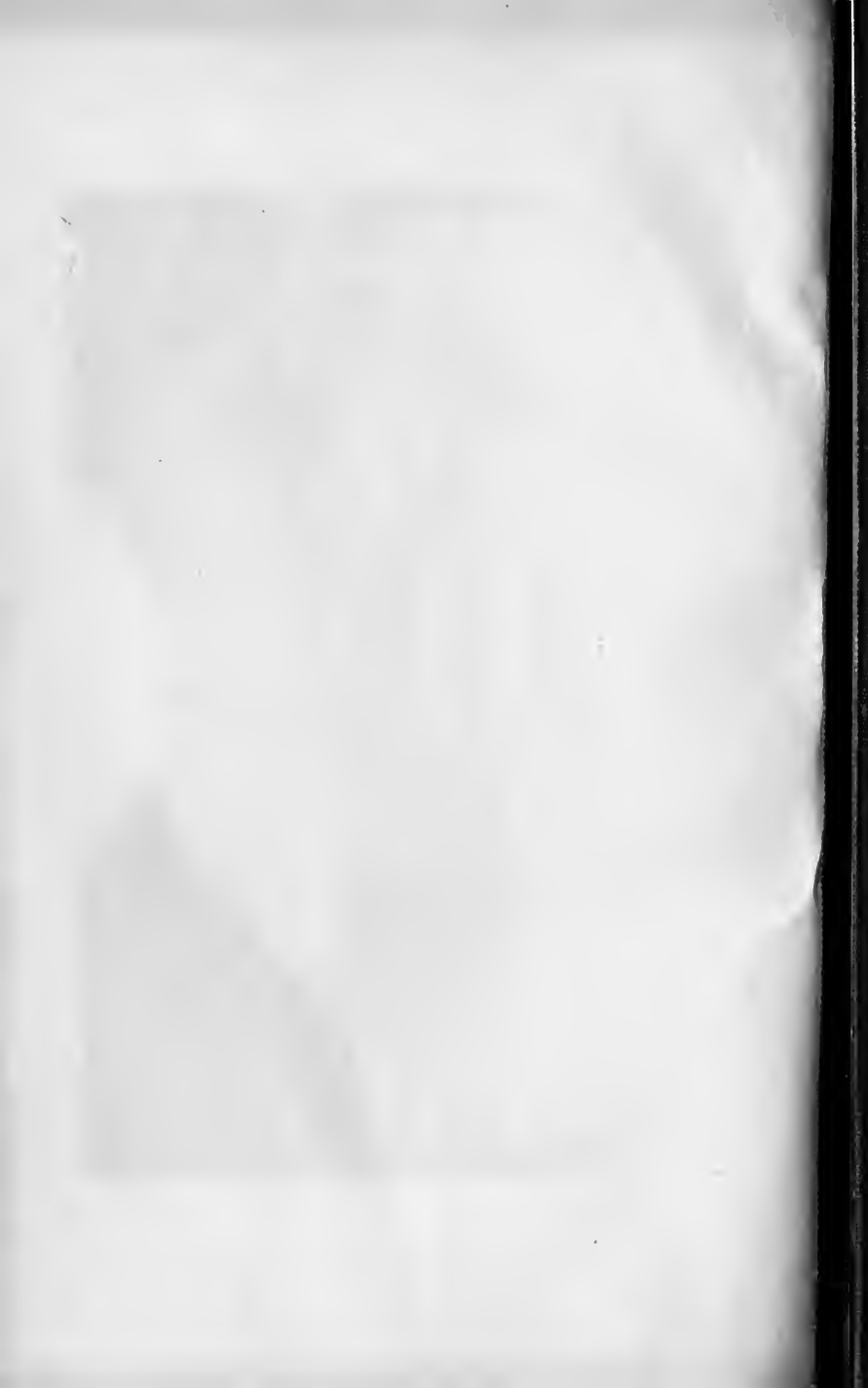












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